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MEENAKSHI'S MEMOIRS

BY

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Rupees Three
G. A. NATESAN & CO.
MADRAS

Printed and Published for Miss H. Kaveri Bai
by G. A. Natesan & Co., G. T., Madras. January 1937.

THE AUTHOR

SHE is the only daughter (there are two sons) of the late Mr. Havayee Narayan Seshagiri Rao, Postmaster, and of Mrs. Seshagiri Rao till recently a school mistress in Government service, and now retired. Mr. Seshagiri Rao was the last representative, in the Hindu line, of the Havayee family who were Purohits attached to the court of the Mahratta kings of Tanjore. In his religious zeal he had once for all abandoned the ancestral lands in Mayavaram, a gift from the Rajahs, and later on spent his own rather petty earnings chiefly in publishing pamphlets against cruelty to animals, thereby hoping to convert people to vegetarian views. To the last he remained opposed to any imitation of the West in matters of costume and manners and customs. He died at Vizagapatam on 14-8-31.

Mrs. Seshagiri Rao is a daughter of the late Rev. Job Paul of Bangalore, the latter's father being at first a persecutor of Christian Missionaries and Christians, and later on becoming a convert with all his sons, thereby obtaining the significant name of 'Paul' being bestowed on him at his baptism.

INTRODUCTION

MY DEAR MISS BEDFORD,

I have your letter asking me to write my own story for publication in a pamphlet. If the suggestion had come six months earlier, I do not know how my mind would have reacted. But now, after seeking close touch with the Lord so long, my whole outlook on life is undergoing a revolution. Shock after shock of circumstances and revelations against all what I had known to be life, and what I thought was the world, have shattered and sapped my old being. Long, long months of ceaseless struggle and bitter conflict—oh, God, I shudder at the very thought of it. Do you not feel Miss Bedford that the individual soul passes through the same torture of travail for a new birth, as the throes of Nature to bring forth a new world?

You have asked me material for a small pamphlet, but with an ocean surging in my brain and heart, can I release only a few dribblets? When I take up my pen, some force beyond my control is driving it. I do not know what I write. What are the agonies and sufferings of one obscure creature among the myriads of the universe? I ask myself. But even the thought of my own insignificance fails to comfort me. What may not so much as a breath touch

the atmosphere of the universe, is enough to crush a weak frail vessel of flesh. Can you guess that, if at the critical moment you had not appeared on the scene, I might now be a demented creature or a handful of dust? I was once in a great electric power-station. Some of the areas containing wires of high voltage were screened off from the surrounding place and carried, on a board in large letters, the warning signal DANGER. I had but to touch a single wire to pass into eternal oblivion. But why did I desist, when my eyes were eagerly scanning the wires and my fingers itching for the fatal contact? Not fear, nor even the presence of the other members of the Excursion Party. To this day I cannot say what it was. But from that moment I began to think of electrocution as the best method to put an end to all my miseries, when I should no longer be able to support life.

But you came with a message as startlingly new, as it was familiarly old. I felt that I must let you see the inside of my heart—not that anybody could undo what was done to make my life a tragedy, but only to disburden myself of a little of the load that was crushing me without killing. You saw what it cost me to narrate my story. But thank God, I did it. I can write the story now with the hope that if, by chance, it fell into the hands of some of the wrong-doers of the world, who may have some spark of human grace still left, to realise what their self-indulgence means, not to the world at large, let alone the world—but

to those whom they profess to love: parents, children, brothers, sisters, husbands, wives.

I do not say that "the peace that passeth all understanding" has come to stay with me. I wonder whether the moment will ever come when my heart will have its rest. As it is, to this moment, do what I might, pray how I might, the old thoughts return again and again and again, with unsurpassing cruelty and irresistible force.

I have always said my prayers from a child—in my tender years, not infrequently for things that bring a smile on my face now. There was one Soruna who could turn her upper eyelids inside out whenever she pleased, with the utmost facility. I would pray to God to give me this gift. In the same way I used to pray that God would help me to make a fillip with my thumb and middle finger, to whistle like my uncle, and to perform a sort of tattoo played, with the thumb on one cheek, the middle finger on the other and the forefinger on the tip of the nose, with only the consonant sound of 't' produced by the tongue without vocal sounds in accompaniment to the play of these fingers. Not the least was my desire that God would make me sick like my sister Sophie, because she was made, so much of.

In childhood, I believed that God would do anything I wanted; in adolescence I disbelieved in everything but the fact of the existence of a holy but relentless and most exacting God, and a Christ who belonged to a time two thousand

years back. There were many things which I wanted to do, which I thought would meet with His stern disapproval if I kept close to Him and consulted Him. Hence except at bed-time, when I mechanically recited a few prayers, with my mind on something else, I never cared to approach Him. The chief cause of my scepticism was that, some of the terrible things happening in the family, for the stopping of which, in terror and tears, I had often supplicated, kept on growing worse. In any case youth is not usually a period when thoughts tend to be spiritual unless the good seed had been sown at birth.

But such a blessing was not for me. The real meaning and use and power of prayer were absolutely unknown to me. It must have been unknown, to my parents also; for there are thousands of Christians who are so, because their ancestors were converts, and not that they realised any spiritual benefit themselves. As for me, even now my prayer alone does not sustain me. For whenever I have the lapses, I do not feel like going to God. But your prayers and letters are my main support and consolation, so that even if I fail to seek God, He comes seeking me through a friend like you.

Since you did not ask me six months before the right moment, I shall gladly set to work to write and send you my biography, if happily any section of humanity could be benefitted by its revelations. I am now trying to look at the

world from an impersonal point of view. I have trained myself to hold that the sensitive outcaste of the story is dead and gone, and her biographer is a totally different individual. But there are other actors in the drama, whom I have no right to expose, by mentioning their real names, or the actual names of the places where the scenes are laid. For this reason I have thought it expedient to adopt a disguise, whenever things are glaringly transparent.

The most distressing circumstance confronting me is this. The one, who has done me the deadliest wrong for all life; and inflicted on me, a mortal soul-corroding wound, was the most affectionate and kindest relative Nature had given me; and she is no longer alive. Shall her memory suffer disparagement at my hands, of all? But now, I am sure, if one soul could be benefitted by going through this tragedy, her spirit will rejoice, for being at least profitable to the world after death. So, you see, Miss Bedford at what cost, I am writing this about one from whose life my own was inseparable till her passing away! To expose her character and to mourn her death! May never another mortal stand in the same predicament! But she will forgive me, seeing that her own lips declared her deadly guilt, when filled by the grace of God, on her death-bed, the world was nothing to her. She died with the consciousness of being forgiven.

One point more. In the setting forth of my experiences, I must not retrospectively use, the

knowledge which I came to possess only at the close of the story and hence I cannot but continue to mention the several members of the family, according to the relationship in which they stood. Yes, Miss Bedford, do, by all means, publish my story; but do not fail to remember me in your prayers.

YOURS WITH LOVE,
MEENAKSHI.

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

IN publishing the above letter as a Preface to the Autobiography, I am bound to state that Meenakshi is not the author's name, nor is Pauline Bedford mine. The names have been assumed for the sake of convenience. Further, certain communal and place-names, which were later altered by statute, are used in these pages to prevent anachronisms, as they were in vogue at the time that the events described had taken place. Such, for instance, are: Natives, Eurasians, Pariah; Chuckler, Sudra, Black Town, and so on. The Tamil used, is the dialect of the lower castes and classes in Madras, and so it is possible that refined Tamils may not understand it.

One more observation. Meena is but an ordinary mortal, with an ordinary mortal's prejudices and feelings and failings but considering the circumstances which have called forth such bitter remarks, I see in her not a cynical nature, but an unconquerable intolerance for injustice in any form.

PAULINE BEDFORD.

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CHAPTER I

THE CONVERT AND HIS FAMILY

THE first convert from the Chuckler or Madiga (lowest of 'Untouchables') community of Sunderkote was my grandfather, Murry Juggayya. He was the youngest son of carpenter Nagadu, who by caste, however, being a professional corpse burner, belonged to the lowest of 'Untouchables'. This family coming much under missionary influence, though Nagadu and his older children preferred to remain unbaptised to the end, my grandfather underwent conversion and was educated to be a preacher. Following the quaint notion of some missionaries, that ancient Hebrew, Greek or Roman names suited an Indian convert better than his own national name, they rechristened him, Jacob, some handy substitute for Juggayya. My grandmother had already undergone the process, when her missionary patrons changed her name from Durgamma into Deborah. She was a boarding girl when the marriage took place.

The change in faith and names seemed to have brought about a transformation—both for better and for worse—in character as well ; for the converted pair, after holy matrimony, set about assiduously

severing all connection with the old stock, as they were refined enough by this time, to call their blood relations vulgar. At the same time, they started speculations for making money and were always devising grand schemes for getting more and observing greater thrift. Mr. Jacob at no time received a higher salary than the incredibly minute pittance of eight rupees per mensem, equivalent to half a pound in English money. Granting that the purchasing power of a rupee was astonishingly great in the good old times, my grandfather's pay alone could have by no means laid the foundation of the prosperity of the Jácobs. Nor had the casual selection of a bride for a man ever resulted in a more ideal mating than between my grandparents; for both having many points in common, they worked together with such zest that from quite humble beginnings, they were able, step by step, to pile up a fortune for themselves and to acquire a status in the world. Both had a strong commercial instinct for earning, using and saving, and both had an unlimited ambition to rise. Their fiscal policy was shaped with a view to tapping all possible resources of wealth, even if the yield was only by drops and dribblets. Their economic measures might have done credit to the greatest financier the world has ever known.

They lived in a single-roomed mud hut with straw thatched roofing, that stood by itself, alone in a large open space, overgrown with grass and bushes, broken with pits and ditches and scattered over with heaps of rubbish. In those days, these grounds

belonged to anybody for use as a public latrine and a receptacle for the garbage of the surrounding cottages ; and goats and pigs and poultry wandered at will in search of their breakfast the whole day long. Now, the grounds consist of a group of buildings of all sorts, representing the capital of the Jacobs, and one can hardly recognise the site to be the same *maidan* just described above. Without wasting money on drink or gambling, nor even on fineries in costume, the prevailing vice of upstarts, and subsisting on the minimum nourishment compatible with health, consisting chiefly of ragi paste or cakes and boiled millets, the miserable salary of eight rupees was actually made to leave some savings after meeting the needs of a largely increasing family. It was, indeed, a good record ; for my grandfather had no less than eighteen children. Of course, many had died before they reached their teens. My grandmother in her garrulous old age used to say how, once in a way, when the parents were longing to eat fowl, finding it impossible to feed eighteen other mouths as well, they would kill a chicken after the children had all gone to bed, and cooked and ate, a banquet at midnight.

Lest my account of my grandparent's achievements be interpreted as purely mythical, let me hasten to add that their missionary patrons undertook the children's education and often gave them clothes and other help. Mr. and Mrs. Jacob were gifted with an extraordinary skill for flattery, which was not quite lost upon the rather susceptible and trusting missionaries of a by-gone age, and possessed a special talent for simulating distress in a way that

could wring tears from a stone. They gained no end of material advantage by the constant exercise of these talents.

My grandmother was a Zenana woman, a name disgraced by the majority in that line, not only on account of their spiritual emptiness, but more by their meanness. The greater part of the time she spent on evangelical duty in a house she utilised in making anxious enquiries affecting the culinary department, the recipes and such things with downright flattery regarding a Brahmin housewife's skill in cooking, that it usually resulted in her being presented with parcels of rice, samples of dishes, chutneys and pickles. In those days the Zenana women could not even cross the threshold of a caste-Hindu dwelling. In the houses of the rich, her tactics were slightly changed; there was usually a pathetic representation of the daily struggle with want and the sickness of this member or that, the grand conclusion being a request for a cast off garment. None could have been better qualified for a Bible-woman than my worthy ancestress, Deboramma.

To speak of sundry other things, the Jacobs were to a large extent self-sufficing. They maintained a kitchen garden and reared poultry. All these it must be remembered came by gradual degrees. As years went on and their prosperity increased, they introduced goats and cattle on the scene, starting with a single she-goat and one milch cow. Slowly, extensions were made to the whilom one-roomed hut to contain a few more rooms, and in course of time too

the thatch gave place to a tiled roof. But all these improvements meant hard labour for the folks, since not a single hired worker was employed to dig the earth, to raise the walls or to fashion door and window frames, except for the building of the roof and covering it with tiles. All this my grandmother used to relate with a sense of satisfaction and pride in her old age not only to her grandchildren, but even to strangers, much to the chafing of the sons and daughters who saw nothing grand in that.

Apart from 'drawing the water and hewing the wood', there was the milking of the cows and goats by the boys and the patting of dung-cakes by the girls. This last mentioned drudgery, my mother remembered with bitter resentment to her dying day, and as far as I am aware, never forgave her mother-in-law, for making a girl of a decent family soil her hands with dirty work and other manual labour, nor did she lose a single opportunity, to prejudice our minds from infancy against what she considered the meanness and vulgarity of her husband's family. She had come of a converted Vellala family, refined and cultured for some generations. Having lost her own mother in early childhood, the malice of a step-mother had caused her to be handed over to the first 'infamous' suitor, as she used to put it, because it was known that the Jacobs had money, though nobody saw how they lived. Her father, a retired telegraph master, having died soon after her marriage, my mother was cut off from her own relatives completely and

had no maiden home to go to for a change or a holiday, nor even for her first confinement which, according to Indian custom and tradition, should take place in the young lady's father's house.

In the mother-in-law's house, apart from the rough work she had to do and living in a family so much beneath hers by caste, tradition, manners and habits, she had also to face all sorts of insulting references to her destitute state, by which they meant to make her feel that they had picked her up a waif, who owed a shelter and the supply of her daily needs to her marriage in the family.

Well, fortune steadily favoured the Jacobs, till at present at Sunderkote, they have a group of buildings in cramped grounds, enclosed by a brick wall with an imposing gateway in front. The buildings themselves fail to elighten a visitor as to a definite plan, being all in an irregular and rambling style, considering that each pile came up only when there were sufficient funds to construct the same. The latest of these architectures is the only solid one, being built of stone and teak wood. But it is not so large as the showy one which has a porch in front, and rooms for two families, one on the ground-floor and one on the top. This decent-looking house, however, has flimsy and rotten rafters of bamboo, and the inner doors and windows under their heavy coatings of varnish do not fail to reveal their identity with boards once forming package boxes. The Jacobs now keep a pony and two fashionable bullock coaches. They own acres of corn land

interspersed with fruit trees and patches of vegetables, and they run a general stores depot, thus able not only to supply the family requirements, but to drive a prosperous business as well. The houses are rented out either to private families or public offices, and in the intervals that they are not occupied, they relieve the pressure of overcrowding in the house.

In the midst of all this affluence, however, at present there is one thing that stands as a powerful reminder of the past, the cow dung patting, milking and carpentry being no longer done by the educated sons and daughters, but by hired labourers, who are mainly the farm workers, and the drivers of the carriages, one of which is a hackney. It is the whilom one-roomed mud and straw hut. With all its alterations it remains out of keeping with its surroundings. Not all the agitation of the stylish sons and daughters, for its total demolition, could persuade the aged couple to forsake it. They had their own idea of respect to a certain limit, but after that was reached, the more refined tastes of the younger generation failed to affect them. They tenaciously clung to the place which was their earliest home, where all their children were born and brought up, which had held the still motionless bodies of those who had left them bereaved, the spot which saw them blessed with the smiles of fortune. It was holy ground to the venerable pair. There they wanted to spend their old age, and there they wanted to die. They never cared to live in any of the grand buildings, not even to

keep up the respect of their sons and daughters. Even distinguished visitors, who were to be introduced to the parents, had to be seated on the low-roofed mud verandah, with its stringed charpoy, where grandfather spent his days and nights, its one long wooden bench, the clumsy stool, the couple of rough mutilated chairs, the mud tray with ashes under the bed to receive grandpa's expectorations, and the lines across two pomegranate trees in front, where hung washed linen that was never white and which often greeted the visitors with a flap on their faces when they dived under the string to gain the verandah. The poultry also having access here, made the place dirty; and besides the brooms and pots that met one's eyes under the verandah, there were glimpses of the low, narrow, stuffy rooms full of smoke from the kitchen, all proving an outrage to the nerves of the ladies and gentlemen of this family. Another provoking idiosyncrasy of the old couple was, their refusal to give soiled clothes to the dhoby, till they had had at least three washings at home, with indifferent results.

My father was the eldest son, though the first born was my spinster aunt and foster mother, Kezia. When he married, his family was still at the cow dung patting stage, the very recollection of which proved such an incubus to my mother, long after she was rid of it. As the younger children began to finish their education, a maid-of-all-work was engaged to do all the rough labour. From now on, there was a great deal of pain-taking and self-imposed discipline gone through,

chiefly by the younger members of the family to acquire a status. The desire found its expression in either of two ways with all converts from Pariah and Chuckler ranks.

For one thing, India, even at the time of my writing this, is still a caste-ridden country. This evil has not lost its hold on nominal Christians and even on otherwise godly families. But nothing can surpass the sorry spectacle of an upstart people, as they progress in wealth and culture, going through a process of evolution from 'Untouchability to Brahminism, the summit and glory of the caste hierarchy. A Brahmin, even if he is a pauper, is a social aristocrat, and hence it is the ambition of many Indian Christians to trace a Brahmin lineage, although, granting that it is a proven fact, to the Brahmin community every Christian is an outcaste, whatever may have been his origin.

On the other hand, till very recently, where government, railway and other business under European control was concerned, even the least educated and sorriest looking hatwallah, without a drop of the white man's blood in his veins, had the advantage over his betters, clad in Indian costume in the matter of jobs, and further could be as haughty as he pleased and bully or mock the 'Natives', as creatures beneath his notice. No wonder then, that job hunters preferred to identify themselves with the ruling class and went through a process of evolution of a different nature, this time from untouchability to Sahibism.

My grandfather's family took this matter of social evolution into serious consideration and settled in favour of Brahminism, though later on some of the sons tried to be Eurasians. But ours was a black family; for in the province of Madras, Pariahs and Chucklers usually have skins resembling the colour of roasted coffee beans, a thing to be rarely met with among Brahmins. But in the wonderful medley of diversity, that is India, there is always something handy as a first step to the enterprising climber, and in this instance, it was the Vaisya or Bunya caste, that came to our rescue. Though Vaisyas are only next to the Brahmins in caste and belong to the aristocracy or patrician set, as well as being staunch vegetarians like the Brahmins, still in colour and looks, the community as a whole differs very little from ours. Indeed, the Sudras, or non-Brahmins as they are now called, being the Plebians, can easily pass for Brahmins in their appearance. The Vaisya caste gave us the first opportunity to rise; for the Jacobs declared themselves in the first instant, Bunya converts. True it was, that in the Chuckler quarter of the town, my grandfather's own brothers and sisters and first cousins and their descendants lived still; and true it was that the contemporary Christians all were eyewitnesses to grandfather's conversion from the corpse burning caste, but the Jacobs were undaunted. No stone was left unturned to introduce real blue blood into the family. My mother was light complexioned and was very good looking, but she was a Vellala and not a

Brahmin. All the same they gave her out to be a Brahmin convert.

As far as personality went, no amount of ambition, culture or comfort in the family could in a single generation obliterate the trace of centuries of serfdom and social oppression. Some kind of servile expression in the features and clownishness of manners still lingered on. Some members in their valiant endeavours to behave as if riches and education were not new to them, developed frigidity. There was a painful cultivation of pose and reserve when in company which, rather than appear natural, seemed cold and theatrical.

Another thing that required the most sweating spade work was the acquisition of a high caste dialect, accent and manner in conversation. This was the hardest trial of all, considering that a personal touch with the higher castes, every sense alert alone could make this accomplishment possible, and such contact necessitating conversation, our people betrayed by their speech the very origin they were taking so much pains to hide. But ultimately my father and two of his sisters came out of this ordeal with flying colours. The others did not succeed so well, the old couple being the first to abandon it, seeing no incongruity in their posing as Bunya converts without the characteristic speech. This sort of pretension, if it is at all worth while the exclusiveness practised by upstarts, provokes their one time equals to make a thorough research for and publish facts derogatory to the reputation of sudden climbers.

My grandfather's name was Murry Jacob, but each of his children went by his or her own Christian

name, having the family name only as an initial before it, this being common all over South India. The eldest was aunt Kezia, and then came my father, Mr. Prakasarao. After him my uncle Luke Devasagayam, who keeps the depot, manages the farms and was twice elected member of the municipal council for the Christian constituency of Sunderkote. Next to him were aunt Sarah or Sarahmma, who married a Brahmin convert school-master, a widower, who had two daughters by his previous wife—aunt Sarah herself was childless—and aunt Katie, wife of Mr. Martin, an Anglo-Indian railway guard. Two brothers came after these two sisters, my uncle Sudarsanam, a forest ranger and uncle Purushotham, a truant at school in his schoolboy days, and a loafer in his youth, boasting of endless grand schemes for his career, none of which he ever tried, and yet by some unaccountable stroke of luck, the influence of Mr. Martin, his brother-in-law, and the family property, became a railway guard under the name of Murray, a slight alteration of our surname, Murry (Banyan tree).

The juniormost of the Jacobs was my aunt Krupa, whose actual name was Lizzy Devakrupavaram. She looked as if she might have been the daughter and not the sister of either my father or aunt Kezia. Not only did grandfather's senior children look a generation older than his junior children, but everywhere there were gaps, where the other twelve of the original eighteen had been. As for my aunt Krupavaram, she was a lady doctor. If her eldest sister Keziamma, who worked, as a teacher in a

municipal elementary girls' school, was the life and soul of the movement towards Brahminism, aunt Krupa after finishing her course became such a thorough-going, ardent nationalist, that she dropped her old name and called herself L. K. Devi, a slight change from L. Devakrupavaram. She would have had her father change his new name and be the old Mr. Juggayya again, but for the grey-haired gentleman's indignant disapproval of further changes, and so perforce she could not be other than Miss or Doctor Jacob. It was not a little chagrin to her to be persistently called Krupamma and not Devi by her former friends and neighbours, the most feline natured of these taking a malicious delight in humiliating her thus before those who knew her only by her latter name.

It is strange that while my grandfather was making for a Brahmin ancestry, he did not give all his sons, names terminating with Rao, and all his daughters, names terminating with Bai, used only by Brahmins originally, but now imitated by all. My father, however, gave each of his children an English name and a Brahmin name. It seems there was a curious incident connected with this. When my father was managing the sugar and distillery works at Dostanabad, after his rupture with the missionaries at Sunderkote, my sisters were reading in the local girls' school, where their best friends, Caroline and Lucy two sisters, belonging to a caste Christian family, once invited them home. Here they were introduced as Lakshmi Bai and Kamala Bai—the Indian names of Emmie and Sophie—to their mother. The mother forgetting

all notions of decorum, from a sense of being outraged by low caste converts bearing Brahmins' names, greeted my sisters with, "Pariah Bai, Chuckler Bai, Sweeper Bai," every common slut is a Bai nowadays. The result was a violent quarrel between my father and the father of Caroline and Lucy. My father was a man of a fiery temper, and his anger would explode at the slightest hint of an insult to him or his family.

The relations between missionaries and converted untouchables' constitute a highly controversial point, and I hold to my own opinion in the matter, right or wrong. This seems to me more convincing than other views so far. The incontrovertible fact remains, that whereas in their own land of birth, and the home of their forefathers, the system of caste and the Karmic theory had doomed millions of unfortunates to perpetual degradation, slavery, ignorance and squalor, unsweetened by even a remote hope of emancipation in any future age, it was certainly the foreign missionary, who came and broke the fetters of centuries at one stroke, civilized, educated, and placed on the path of unlimited progress, masses of these down-trodden ones, kept in abhorrence as if they were lepers. But there are other facts giving rise to unpleasant issues and leading to strained relations between benefactor and the benefitted. My own impression is this :

There still prevails, or has certainly prevailed, till very, very recently, a tendency among most missionaries, to be dictatorial and patronizing in

their attitude towards their converts, which was sometimes carried to the point of regulating even the private affairs of mission workers. Such intolerable interference, such disgusting condescension, and such frequent exercise of capricious authority, provoke the resentment of the descendants of the converts, so that the relation of paymaster and worker is brought to an abrupt end, as soon as a family's financial condition guarantees its independence. Missionaries complain of basest ingratitude on the part of those who, after receiving their own emancipation, refuse to co-operate with the liberators for the rescue of their own brethren still in darkness. The workers complain of a new kind of slavery substituted for the old. If the missionary's torch helped the worker to see his own human rights, this knowledge makes him impatient of even the missionary's yoke. Such troubles usually occur where there are mass conversions, which are in the nature of a social uplift rather than a spiritual transformation, when missionaries forget that dictatorship, patronage and condescension are not Christ's way of winning or keeping souls.

My father, who could never tolerate anybody being superior to him, soon came into clash with the missionaries and resigned his post as a school-master in his native town and secured the job of manager of the sugar mill and distillery of Dostanabad. By the time he had put in a year's service, he had a visit from his employer, who owned several other mills in various places. My father being an old F. A. thought his education

entitled him to be the equal of missionaries or anybody and had long since taken to the European costume. Mr. Leyland, the employer, a very haughty man, when he inspected the premises and the staff, commanded my father to discontinue the hat and attend office in native costume. My father tried to argue out the matter, but when Mr. Leyland insisted on immediate compliance with the order, my father a hot-blooded man walked nonchalantly out of the office intimating that he had resigned on the spot and that he was his own master. Had this incident only taken place six months earlier, these memoirs would never have been written.

In Dostanabad, a mushroom friendship, quite warm as long as it lasted, sprang up between my father and the Rajah of a certain estate close by. My father's studied policy was to cultivate acquaintance with high society whenever he could. This particular friendship was due to the Rajah's winning a law suit by a certain evidence which my father alone could produce and which involved his prestige deeply. From the moment the case against him was quashed, the aristocrat not only heaped his favours on my father, but would not pass a single day without a sight of him. The suit and the friendship not only brought much material gain to the family, but likewise sowed the seeds of internal discord culminating in the tragedy recorded in these pages.

To repeat a fact already discussed, my father held the old patriarchal views regarding the household government. Fortunately, the law kept

the power of life and death from his hands. Under a systematic course of repression all personal initiative was destroyed. In particular, he kept my mother behind the purdah. She was forbidden to appear before men other than her nearest kinsfolk, and was not to show her face to a stranger. If there was a function in the house, there were compartments for the guests according to the sexes, and he himself, with the help of a servant or the small daughters, served the men, though in an Indian household the duty of ministering to the guests was the privilege of the lady of the house from time immemorial.

It usually happened that the Rajah's Dewan drove to our house to take my father to visit the Zamindar. Before long, his programme underwent a change. Another carriage would come for my father, and after his departure, the Dewan would arrive in his own. My mother had always enjoyed displaying her attractive face, whenever she could evade my father's vigilance, and at the time of the Dewan's visits shook off her purdah, broke all existing rules and regulations, and gave interviews to the stealthy visitor. As my father invariably gave the Rajah his company in the evenings, just as invariably did my mother grant stolen interviews to his minister in her husband's absence. These secret trysts had gone on too far, before my father learnt the state of affairs from some casual conversation with the children, who being always in terror of the pater were not very communicative, where he was concerned.

It was after the discovery of the wife's infidelity, that a period of fiery ordeal for the children began,—nerve-shattering quarrels between father and mother—a patriarchal head, a hot tempered man, and an injured husband on the one side; and on the other, a no longer timidly submissive and chaste wife, but an abandoned woman, who defied him to do his worst. Granting that her husband's repression had made life insupportable and driven her to desperation, was giving herself to a life of shame the remedy? Did relief consist in exposing the children whom she professed to love, to a life of humiliation? The ignominy to which she was subjecting them did not at all trouble her, as long as a trace of youth was left in her to indulge in sensual pleasures. All the same, she never missed an opportunity to fling stones at other women, whether really fallen or maliciously accused of the sin. All day long a cheerless home, sullen looks, harsh words, my mother's terrible tongue, my father's assaults, made the trembling children cower in corners. Young as they were—I was not yet born—they understood each in his or her own way what had gone amiss. The misery of the youngsters was not confined to the daily outbreaks, which chilled them to the marrow, but the poor wretches were dragged into the scenes as well. The father employed them as spies, to watch and report on their mother's conduct, the mother trained them up to tell the most atrocious lies. Neither had any scruple in assaulting the children, the mother being the worst, not caring whether it was a fire-brand or a stool that came to her hands. The poor victims were always in the position of rebels, since

obedience to one parent meant disobedience to the other. Whichever child dared to criticise the mother's action was driven into a room, where she bolted the doors to keep others from interfering and almost murdered the youngster there.

The wronged man was helpless to institute legal proceedings against the destroyer of his home. The latter being a particular favourite of the Zamindar, could use the resources of the estate to ruin his accuser, at the very outset. A second grave danger was that, the Rajah, who in his own personal character, amply justified the conception of the instability of a prince's friendship, might at any moment turn to violent dislike his once violent fondness for father. Under these circumstances, the only course left to him was to remove his family to Sunderkote, pending a final settlement. In the meanwhile occurred the incident of the hat, and my father turned his back on Dostanabad for good.

My father thereafter chose Madras for his residence. The children, especially the girls required a good school and it was previously arranged to send them with aunt Krupa to Kasimode. My uncle Purushotham was a boarder in the Wesleyan Mission School. But these unexpected events changed the original plans. My father obtained a teacher's post in the Christian College and he settled with his family in Black Town.

CHAPTER II

REMINISCENCES AND DIGRESSIONS

I was born in Black Town (now George Town). My memory goes a long way back. Not that I remember everything from infancy, but there are some incidents so indelibly fixed in my mind, that it surprises me to think now, that some of them happened before I was three years' old. I remember the masonry trough built round the low tap in the wall to store the water, which, I believe, came in a narrow jet for two or three hours a day. My favourite pastime was to stand on tip-toe and admire my own reflection in the water or to splash it with my tiny hands. I watched dead spiders and cockroaches floating on the surface and live black ants swim across. My dolls and toys had more dips than were good for them, and when they slipped from my hands some floated and some sank down to the bottom. My brothers, whenever they were tired of the street gutters, used this trough as a lake to float their paper fleets which consisted of three types of vessels: Kappal (boat), Kaththi Kappal (armoured boat), Rettai Kappal (double boat). They and my sisters usually sat on the edge dangling their legs in the water.

I came to understand that I had not completed my second year at this time; for an incident occurred here which caused the family to shift from here before my second birthday. It seems that no amount of caning would keep me from toddling off to the trough and getting wet. My mother used to tell what happened one noon, when as usual she took her siesta on a floor-mat with Harry on one side of her and me on the other. Emmie and Sophie were in the boarding coming home only occasionally. Mary and Davy both attended a mixed school near by and came home for dinner, while the servant used to take my father's for him. On this particular day, just as Mary burst into the house by the back door, what was her horror to see my little figure go pop into the water, head over heels! The girl's frantic screams roused and brought my mother to the spot immediately and I was rescued half dead. She had believed me to be quietly asleep by her side, and I must have dodged her and gone to my favourite haunt. If only Mary had not come in just then, what an ocean of sorrow I might have been spared!

I have had many ugly failings, but I suppose the ugliest has been jealousy. I do not remember a time when jealousy was not part of my character. When I was young I could not tolerate my mother parting even with a most unserviceable article to a neighbour. I would not allow her to touch another child or caress any but me. I expressed my rage by throwing myself on the floor screaming continuously, •throwing about my hands

and legs as if in violent convulsions and tearing with my teeth a mat or fan or whatever there was which I could bite.

In those far off days of my childhood, young women and matrons, however refined they might have been, were not accustomed to blouses and petticoats. Their whole dress consisted of a *saree* worn without an undergarment and a short-sleeved small and tight jacket which covered only the bust and not the whole body. My mother also dressed in this way. Although she had a maid to assist her in the house-work, she used to get odd jobs and tasks done by the poorer neighbours, for whom there was no system of payment as my father kept the family exchequer under his direct control and refused to employ more than one servant in the house. My mother could circumvent this inconvenience, by giving occasional presents of grain, a dinner, or one of the old garments, none of these being under my father's vigilance. These helpful neighbours seem to have been friendly rivals in establishing a world record for gossip, and my mother, not English educated herself, gave them splendid encouragement. Nothing seems to have been dearer to her heart than to discuss the scandals of other families. A premium was placed on the failings and infirmities of others and thrills were provided by unlimited exaggeration. Except for a few legends in Tamil poetry, the two stories, Rajah Jai Singh and Nalla Thanga or good sister, she had no taste for reading literature even in her own tongue, and

English she had never learnt. Hence her favourite pastime was idle gossip. The meanness of her husband's family furnished her with an inexhaustible fund of topics, and it never occurred to her that the glory or shame of that family reflected on herself and her children.

My mother's particular chum was a Roman Catholic woman, Arokiamma. I may not be very accurate in computation of her height, for I was such a tiny person then, and she looked tall. A spare black woman, her forearms and legs were tattooed over with figures of scorpions, crabs, fish and geometrical shapes. Her coiffure, a peculiar fashion and the most universal feature among the low classes of Madras, and one, too, by which even an amateur in the study of modes could tell a Madrasee woman from others in any part of the world, was making a knot and thrusting it into the hair over one ear, so that the ball was never in the centre. I seem to see Arokiamma as clearly as if she were physically present before me, in a very popular Madras chintz *saree*, of red ground, showing posies of white and yellow flowers bound with green leaves; a low necked dirty striped bodice; a collar of black beads round her neck, and old fashioned black bead bracelets, with metal clasps on her wrists; a pair of pink stained coils of palm leaf strips inserted in the large lobes of her ears, overhanging which there were a pair of imitation emerald pendants, and with silver rings on her toes; and her lips and teeth red with constantly chewing *pan*. The dirty pouch that dangled from her waist, a part of the

equipment of every Madrasee woman, was her vanity case and my Pandora's box. It contained nothing but the materials for *pan*, betel leaf, nut, chunam and tobacco, but my childish fancy used to imagine all sorts of mysterious things in it; and my inquisitiveness had its due retribution one day, when I extricated a piece of tobacco and chewed it, with the resulting nausea and giddiness making me loath the sight of tobacco to this day. I wish I could have seen the faces that I made when the astringent juice was turning my stomach. Whenever Arokiamma came, I would play with the tattooed figures and try to take them off. This was a trick I tried to perform with the patterns of light thrown on the walls and floors by the sunshine or a lamp. Often these patterns would dance by the waving of branches or the movement of other objects through which the light filtered and I would try to catch the sunbeams and the spots of light in the same way that I tried to pick up the tattooed figures or the flowers in pictures and on dresses. How my little brains used to be puzzled at each failure, I cannot describe. I would walk away from the place and come back and try again as if that made any difference.

I used to enjoy the visits of Arokiamma, especially if she brought one or two of her own youngsters along. She was one of those who adored me and made me hardened in my selfishness. On one occasion, seeing my mother giving her a red and green jacket of Karnatic silk, I registered an emphatic protest. It was held back

but detecting certain suspicious winking of the eyes and exchange of significant gestures, I clung to my mother's *saree* and went round and round her always keeping the bodice in view. But childhood's attention is not capable of sustained concentration, or my mother placated my feelings for the time and gave it away at some other opportunity.

My mother used to call on her neighbours in the lane soon after my father, Mary and Davy had gone to school. Harry followed her. I was always trotting along by her side, holding on to her forefinger. At this time my vertical movements were a little precarious. I used to tumble and fall constantly, when my parents and sisters would look grave and tell me how much the floor was damaged by my fall, so that I would check the choking sobs and keep back the bursting tears, as I searched to see the extent of the alleged damage with a guilty look. When toddling by my mother's side I used to fail to keep pace with her. Often forgetting that I had to be going, I would come to an abrupt stop if any object distracted my attention; and even after it was passed, had to be dragged along, with my face turned over my shoulder gazing on the beloved sight.

One day—the only one I remember—we called at Arokiamma's house, the last one in the lane and closing a blind alley. The family dinner had evidently been just over; for the room, which I could see from the inner verandah, where we were seated, was all littered over with the rejected parts of the meal. Rubbish of any kind

was my speciality in those days, and I dropped on all fours, the method adopted for quick movements, and crossing over the threshold, lay flat on my stomach and was soon lost in the delights of sucking an empty narrow bone, the saliva flowing copiously down my chin. As soon as Ayah (granny), Arokiamma's mother caught me in this unedifying position, she came running with a series of "Chee, chee, chees" (fie, fie, fie) exploding from her lips, lifted me into her arms and snatched away the precious bone and began to wipe my mouth and face. I gave vent to my disappointment in an irruption of rage, screaming and struggling viciously till deposited on the mat, near my mother, I flung myself on it and began to tear the strips savagely with my teeth, uttering piercing shrieks.

I can well understand why small children usually set up a dismal howl whenever mamma goes out without them, even for a second's business across the street, because I remember, why I used to cry. The ideas of little children are extremely vague and their fears numerous. The house opposite to ours had a tap which used to be running long after ours had stopped on account of differences in level. Often my mother would take the half soiled clothes of the children to wash them there, and as I was always a busy body, upsetting things in other people's houses, she would often slip out without my knowledge. My only conclusion was that she had gone away like so many people one sees on the road, not to come back. Oh, those sad little-

ones, whose mothers are snatched away from them by death for ever!

The house about which I have some patches of clearer recollection, in the clouds that have obscured a great many things associated with it, had a guava tree growing up from the pavement of the court yard. One seldom saw an unpaved court yard in Black Town. My father would sometimes bring down ripe guavas with a long bamboo split at the top and kept open by wedging a twig or a splinter. The fruit stalk caught in this opening was twisted till it broke and the apple dropped down. What a scramble, we youngsters had to gather the fruit. Poor I, I was beaten in this competition by my seniors, and especially Davy, who was as agile as a monkey and reckless to boot. Indeed, it would seem that vertical motion was distasteful to him and he would find himself in his element, cutting capers and somersaults. But to return to the fruit gathering, what I lacked in strength and skill, I made up for in shrill cries, and stamping on the ground. My father who almost to the hour of his death had been particularly tender to me, would interfere and compel the others to leave some for me to pick up. Under such powerful backing, I did not hesitate to overstep my limits and clamour for the lion's share.

I have no notion as to whether my earliest recollection of a mango was or was not my very first acquaintance with that delicious fruit. My face must have presented many comical expressions as I was lost in enjoying heaven and had no

thought for looks. I sucked the juicy sweetness, which smeared my lips and chin, ran down my elbows, soaked my frock, and even spread on my legs and feet. I did not mind the flies. The only cruel disappointment was, when the fruit kept slipping out of my hands persistently and brought me down with a rude jerk from the seventh heaven to the sordid earth. I could see the others watching my features and amusing themselves at my expense, but I did not care, with the dripping stone in my hand, till my sister Emmie caught me up and smothered me with kisses, actually licking off the stains from my face, whereat I made many tearful but ineffectual protests.

My mother used to put me by her side when she enjoyed her noon-day nap. My sleepless eyes would scan the dozens of white fluffy spots that flecked the ceiling and were in reality the nests of small fat spiders. About these and the myriad stars that in the night hung from the roof of heaven, as my mother and I lay on a mat, in the small open court, before we retired indoors to sleep, my questions were endless. The muezzin's call for worship in the early dawn had for me a haunting note of music, and I used to wonder whether it was the moon blowing a horn.

In this period of my life, I was a much dreaded vandal. Nothing that came in my way or under my review was safe from my destroying fingers. The books and playthings of my sisters and brothers were seized and spoilt. My eyes appear to have been particularly on the watch

for the ink-bottle. A little unwariness on the part of somebody left it a prize for me, and floors and walls and books and furniture suffered in consequence from my artistic attempts. The smears on my face and hands and dress must have given me the appearance of a little clown. If I came by a bit of paper, I would pretend to be father, sitting in an easy chair, one leg crossed over the other, with the paper in my hands, as I jabbered unmeaning words, or recited with my baby pronunciation the verses I had learnt, when my sisters and Davy were committing pieces to memory, and all the while, I would be stealthily glancing to see that I was being noticed and admired. I felt myself very important to pose like my father, only the canvas did not accommodate my father's entire body as it did mine. How very tiny indeed I must have been in those days! Often Harry and I had heaps of fun tobogganing. Crawling up to the top of the easy chair and sliding down the canvas by turns was an exhilarating game.

My mother seems to have discovered that the best way to keep me out of mischief was to present me with a rag or a slate pencil. For hours and hours and hours I would try to wind the rag about my limbs, *sarce* fashion, and to veil my head with one end, but it invariably ended in failure, since I had no idea of the part a knot played in the mystery of this drapery. Failures did not daunt me, as I would go to it again and again without tiring. If it was a slate pencil, however, my masterpieces were executed

on every tile that paved the floor, the drawings being only a series of rough circles everywhere, the only shape my little hands could manage and never an artist could have been so absorbed with his canvas as I with my floor. Sometimes even though otherwise occupied, if however a sudden inspiration seized me, and a slate pencil were not forthcoming immediately, I would run into the kitchen for a piece of charcoal and covered the walls and floor with drawings.

At this time I was quite unconscious of the fact of people having a right to their belongings alone, and how it constituted a trespass to treat other people's houses and property as our own. Children do not understand the reason for those exclusive rights and claims. They are all communists from birth, till they begin to receive rude shocks and jolts, which give them the views of the world. As a communist in embryo, I made incursions into other people's houses, when prompted by fancy or curiosity. I made no scruple to seize any article that pleased me, much in the same way as I took things belonging to Mary and Davy. There were early attempts at stealing, too, goods stealthily appropriated, knowing that the act was wrong. This I particularly remember in the case of an old woman, who used to carry on her head like Pharaoh's baker, a basket full of rolls and muffins, buns, various kinds of biscuits, and those wee little loaves, so dear to the youngsters in those days, and went four for the farthing. We all gathered round the woman, as she set her basket down, to select

a roll for our daily supply. Now and then I would slip my hand into the basket and slink away with a one-pie loaf as we used to call this tiny morsel.

My reminiscences do not all belong to the same period of my childhood but they are what I recall of the dawn of my life probably covering five years. During this period I was one of those numerous and nasty children, to whom one likes to give a good shaking, but for the fear of offending indulgent parents, who should train them to better manners, at least to behave in company. I was addicted to the disgusting habit of standing and staring at persons eating, following every movement of the hand and mouth. I myself was fond of eating. Being as yet a small child, my feeding hours were earlier than the meal times of the others, my mother usually taking her food after the rest had all had theirs. My feeding used to wear out my mother's patience; besides the noisy clamour to be allowed to use my own fingers to carry the food to my mouth. I was self-appointed supervisor of other people's plates, eyeing with greed and hope, the choicest morsels there. When it came to poor mother's turn however, I was a veritable harpy, for nestling close to her I would boldly appropriate whatever I wanted. She always took her meals alone, both in order to see that the others had the best of everything—poor mother—and perhaps also, to avoid eating in my father's company; for she hated father like poison.

My mother could also tease me at times and one of such incidents I sadly recollect to this

day. On one occasion when I was preparing to act the harpy, there was a tempting slice of fried fish in my mother's plate. I could not go for it seeing that I was not skilled in separating the flesh from the needle-like ribs and was afraid of the bones choking me. So I waited rather patiently for my mother to begin her operations on it, when I was sure to get my share. But to my unspeakable horror and consternation, mother broke one piece of the slice after another and took them all to her own mouth as if no Meena existed in the world, making every effort to attract her attention. I eyed the last bit desperately, and when that too disappeared the way that the others did, I felt stabbed to the heart and behaved like one possessed. Then to my utter amazement, as if by magic, she produced the daintiest morsel of all from her left hand and gathering me from the floor, where I was making a familiar scene, feasted me with it, still with sobs and tears escaping at intervals. Oh, what harsh and heartless thoughts I have often entertained about that mother, and what cruel truths I am compelled to record against her, that other mothers might realise what irreparable injury they could inflict—not in ignorance—on their own loved offspring. Poor mother in heaven would forgive me and be glad if another woman might take a lesson from her own life and cease to continue in sin.

My uncle Purushotham, whose whistling I tried to emulate, taking the burden of my failure to God Almighty Himself in prayer, was in the

Royapettah boarding school. He was the idiot of the family, and though senior to aunt Krupa in years, he was actually two classes below her. He was a young boy in the early days of father's residence in Madras; for he and aunt Krupa were only slightly older than Emmie. Finally, uncle Purushotham gave up his studies and for long years led the life of a loafer without, however, any anxiety for food, raiment or shelter, because the old parents were alive and there was no lack of the necessaries of life. Once this uncle presented me with an India-rubber doll, which would squeak if I pressed the button on her stomach. Seeing that he often brought presents of toys for us all, after he had grown a man, I was greatly impressed by my uncle's grandeur and munificence, knowing nothing of his boyhood escapades and regarding him as a fairy prince. But that is another matter. To go back to my rubber doll, she did not retain her proper shape for long. Either prompted by an instinct for anatomy, foreshadowing the career that I was to choose in life, later on, or the desire to study the capacity for brains in my dolly's head, one day I tore open the scalp and finding nothing but an empty skull, proceeded to fill it with the seeds of cluster beans, which they call, kothu avara kai. For opening the skins to get the seeds, and scattering them all over the house, when my mother had cleaned and kept them ready for cooking, I danced a little under the cane when my vandalism was discovered. But in the meanwhile, seeing that the bean

seeds did not stay in the brain cavity, having slid down into the hollow trunk, I took the mutilated creature to the tap, and turned the jet into her skull. Not content with subjecting her to these outrages, I finished with her by ripping the stomach open for the sake of the whistle.

Flowers and trees have always cast a glorious spell on me and especially, in the brick wilderness of Black Town. Even the sight of grass or a gohl mohur flower sent me into unspeakable ecstasies. My father cherished some flower plants in pots, and with all my love for a garden, my curiosity would often get the better of me and I would pull off the leaves or uproot a sapling, to study botanic mysteries. Once I also tried an experiment in the gardening line. Picking up a piece of a board from a package box, I covered one end of it with earth dug from a flower pot and buried two bean seeds—motcha kottai—in it. I carefully moistened the bed, but kept digging the seeds out, every now and then, to examine their condition before covering them up again. Despite these hindrances one happy morning behold, two lovely stems had sprouted up and how they gladdened the heart of a five-year-old! I could never part with my portable garden and carried it about with me everywhere. The next day the plants had grown like Jack's bean stalk, but I was rather disappointed to find that the heads were not erect. My mother said that that was how bean plants sprouted up, but afterwards they would go straight. But I was not satisfied

and when I was taking my coffee, I tried to improve upon nature and set to work to straighten the bent tops. Snap went the heads one after another and both fell into my coffee and in the little bed stood two headless stalks. Thus ended my first horticultural attempt.

I must have been more than three when I had my first experience of a rose bush. We kept only some foliage plants and some flowers in pots. At about this time, my mother came to know that the Nadars, some of the friends of her maiden days, had long settled in Madras, and she took an early opportunity to call on them. There were rows of tall rose plants growing from the earth and not in flower pots, as it was a large garden and not a paved court yard. I cared nothing for the people we had gone to see, but rushed into the garden gathering handfuls of rosebuds. My mother's repeated summons were unheeded, chiefly owing to the encouragement I received from her friends, that baby need not be chided for such a slight fault, although I now understand it was only spoken as a matter of courtesy, considering the joy of the first meeting after an age of parting and absence of news of each other's welfare. I only waved a handful of the buds to my mother crying exultingly: "Amma, baby guavas, baby guavas." The ladies were amused and my mother replied that they were flower buds and not guavas, but I preferred to keep to my own opinion and dived deeper into the bush to get more of the baby guavas, and immediately beat a hasty retreat, frock torn, and hands lacerated

and bleeding, while the ever ready tears came to my relief, and I did not regret having dropped all my baby guavas in extricating myself. As I lay crying with pain and chagrin on my mother's lap, some one gathered and brought me a number of the severed rose buds and soon I consoled myself in opening them and wondering at the beautiful undeveloped pink petals enclosed within, which were soon crushed and scattered.

CHAPTER III

OUR HOUSEHOLD

I have so far introduced my father as a rolling stone, but as such he seems to have been an extremely lucky man, if luck could be measured by jobs and gold. He was a man of extraordinary knowledge and business ways, but he alienated friends and relatives by his cynicism and unpleasant manners. People felt that he thought it beneath his dignity to appreciate or even to recognise merit in others. If some individual's achievements had been enthusiastically discussed and held up for acclamation, he had only cold water to throw on the enthusiasm with the sneering remark that given the same circumstances and advantages every Tom, Dick and Harry could have accomplished as much. He was of ordinary height, black and muscular having puffy cheeks brushed by heavy mustachios. Though in later life his ideas underwent a drastic change, for long years he had a pious veneration for the English costume,—which even now is a passport to a great many privileges, whether strictly recognised by law or otherwise,—and even for relaxation at home, he would not go in for Indian garments.

He was very fond of his family, but treated the members as if they had no souls, and God had entrusted him with the task of supplying the

omission. He was suspicious, dictatorial and ruled us by repression, allowing us no freedom or initiative, even in the most trifling matters. What but years of bitterness as long as life lasted, what but tragedy upon tragedy could be the result of such an exaggerated idea of authority? During his absence which was for most part of the day, his wife and children did the very things they were forbidden to do, which perhaps they would have avoided if he had trusted them and treated them as his equals. I say, perhaps, for the truth is only known to God, whether some of us would have lived better if father had not been so severe. Before Him however, no flesh can justify itself for well meditated actions, with reasons and excuses such as those we put forward before men.

When I was old enough to understand my mother, I found her utterly void of scruples; extremely vindictive where my father was concerned and taking a pleasure in going contrary to his wishes, even when she could have avoided it. If she had only wished for peace in the house, she could have done much for it. She loved her children dearly. Even the she-wolf or the tigress does so. She made us see her profligacy, not caring what a ruinous effect it would have on our young lives. She kept the *purdah* till my father's back was turned and then stationed herself at the window or stood on the *pial*, or even went out giving a round of visits.

Of the children, Emmie Lakshmi Bai, her mother's very image, though not so light in

complexion, was the first-born. Then came Sophie Kamala Bai, dark, undersized and sickly, with nothing attractive about her face except her large eyes. She was the ugly duckling of the family, but my father had a special tenderness for her, as she seems to have strongly resembled a favourite sister he had lost. Sophie was the emblem of patience and meekness. Mary, who came next, had father's puffy cheeks and small eyes, but her mother's fine lips and nose and she was of Emmie's complexion. From the time I remember, she was taller than Sophie. When Emmie was still in frocks, it seems my mother chose the same colour and cut for the first and third daughters, and a different one for the middle girl, when selecting and making clothes. If Sophie had none of the liveliness, the exuberance of spirit and wit and humour of the rest of us, she had none of the callousness which we possessed. She was very gentle, but rather dull and gloomy, and rather preferring to be left to herself, dreading to play rough games for fear of being hurt, unwilling to give pain to others and shuddering to tell a falsehood. She was quite content to have the last place, and the things rejected by the rest in their scramble to secure the best. She never cared for looks or for dress and had not the least desire for pretension.

After Mary came David Sunder Rao, the spoilt child of the family, for coming after three girls and taking the parents by surprise. His character is the most difficult to analyse; for in certain things he was inhuman, unnatural and

vicious; while he was capable of great sacrifice, and had pleasant manners, was full of activity, sparkling wit and humour. I believe, he always acted on the impulse of the moment and expected every one to agree with him in everything he did; and in his own opinion, he was infallible. He is very unhappy in his married life, and one familiar with the troubles between father and mother, could see the tragic drama enacted over again in his family.

The next child was Harry Sanjeeva Rao, a junior edition of his father and thereby resembling Sophie more than any other sister or brother. But he was as big-boned and robust as Sophie was puny and small. He was Davy's junior by four years and was both the elder brother's special playmate and faithful disciple. Davy took no interest in the game of his sisters except for the sensation he derived by spoiling them. Harry's chief pastime, however, was to strike and pinch everybody who offended him. He was only about a year and a half old when I was born, and my mother had a great concern for my safety, since Harry's jealousy stopped at no limit for the one who had usurped his place. He hated the very sight of me and was constantly planning vengeance. Often he would upset my crib with me. Once it seems he began laying a cane on me, the more vigorously, the more lustily I cried, till before my sobs could choke me, my mother came and wrested the cane from his hand, giving him some cuts in return. Often, bending over my face pretending to kiss me, he

would suddenly give a blistering slap or dig his nail into my cheek and run away. I still carry the scar of one of those nail marks. He became such a positive danger to the new arrival, that for some months my mother had a job to keep me out of his reach.

My poor mother's delight in telling anecdotes about our childhood exploits never flagged till the day of her death. One of the incidents concerning Harry was, that once a neighbour called to see my mother, who had just finished giving me a wash. As I was universally acknowledged to be pretty among relatives and friends, everybody used to hug and crush me and smother me with kisses. The visitor naturally took me from my mother's arms and began giving the final touches to my toilet. Harry burst into the room with a thick ruler in his hand. My mother in a panic, covered me with her arms, and asked the little fellow, whether he was going to bang the baby with the rod, whereupon, with a sweet smile, the little lad told her: "No, this is my hobby horse. I am going to ride it." Then brightening up at the sight of me in the neighbour's hand, he asked the good woman to take away the child as it was not wanted in the house.

The last child was Willie Dharma Rao. It was after Willie was born, that the long threatened avalanche thundered down and destroyed our home. This boy was several years my junior, but more about him later.

CHAPTER IV

CHILDHOOD DAYS

WE have lived in several parts of Black Town, but our neighbours have everywhere been a sort of cosmopolitan population consisting chiefly of Eurasians, Muslims and Christians, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. The large majority must have been Hindus, though somehow they do not come to my mind now. But I do not think that Black Town had many Brahmin residents. In the course of our constant shiftings, we have lived in more than one house belonging to the same proprietor, who owned several houses in this part of Madras, and rented them all out. I have seen the old man during his drives in Mannady and also during his visits to father, when he would specially send for me, as he liked to talk to me and tease me for not going to school. Where I have the earliest recollection of neighbours, is just a vague and half-forgotten dream-like vision of those who must have been moving intimately with us.

There were the Perinayagams, a Roman Catholic family to begin with. Mr. Perinayagam, a lean, fair man, whom I remember only in a white *dhoti*, white coat and white turban, was a butler in some European household. From what I have heard mother tell her chums, he was a

Mudaliar convert and Arokiamma, a Pariah woman, was actually his mistress and not his married wife. I have already introduced Ayah, Arokiamma's skinny old mother. Whatever her real name might have been, she was everybody's ayah, a universal granny. In her time, she must have worn those enormous ear-rings to hold which large holes in the ears were made and the skin stretched out till the lobes swept the shoulders. But Ayah, as she stands in my memory, wore her cumbrous ornaments no longer and the mis-shapen ears only flapped and swung to and fro as she moved about. In my childhood, there were several of these old fashioned women, old or middle aged, who still carried the marks of an antiquated beauty treatment with or without the golden weight, that had stretched the ear lobes to an enormous extent. I have even heard some say, that in their own case, the soft flesh being torn, the broken ears had to be patched up. I wonder, if survivals of this extraordinary fashion are still to be met with anywhere.

The Perinayagams had three daughters and a son, of ages that plainly revealed where others had been. The eldest, Jenny, was a house-maid in some European or high class Eurasian family. I cannot for the life of me recollect her looks or her dress; for though her father's family and ours were in frequent touch for many years till my mother's flight and the break up of our home, Jenny had long parted from her parents and was dead to them, 'so that I never saw her

in my later childhood as I did the others. Next to her came Muthu, several years younger and an ebony edition of Dickens' Fat Joe. Muthu at this time was past the age for *komanams*, the sparest, scantiest scrap of garment imaginable, which the naked little boys of Madras wear, except when going to school and church or visiting. Like other lads of his own years, except in fashionable Christian families where the European dress was adopted, Muthu went about in loose pyjamas of chintz or some other ladies' stuff, baggy at the waist and drawn tight at the ankles. His home dress consisted of nothing for the back. Muthu's best breeches were trimmed at the edges of the leggings, with a narrow braid of red or black crepe called the *gotu*. Somehow, Madras mothers not only fancied for their boys' trousers materials that had on them flowers or sprigs or other designs meant for women's clothing, but decorated the garments with trimmings as well and the boys themselves did not seem to disapprove the maternal tastes. Muthu being a butler's son, and the only boy in the family, was always properly dressed. This young hopeful appeared to have had no higher aim in life than to play tip-cat, marbles, tops and flying kites, in their popular seasons, with the Muslim, Eurasian and Christian boys of the street.

Lurdhu Mari, the tamil version of Lourdes Mary, was the next child. She was only about Mary's age, but while my sister still wore frocks, this girl dressed like a flapper in a skirt and

bodice and a *thavani*. Inheriting her father's looks and colour, she was a very fine girl, elegant in her bearing and graceful even when performing the roughest tasks.

Lurdhu Mari's younger sister, Jeya Mari, was a small school girl, dark and lean, and wearing undersized blouses and skirts, that left her knees and arms bare. It is seldom that I think of people whom I knew in the distant haze of my childhood's early days, but when I do, it is seldom without a deep sense of regret that I recall Jeya's memory. Like Sophie, she used to be a melancholy creature. One evening I was standing in the lane at our back gate with a handful of undevelopped guavas which had dropped from our tree. Jeya was returning home from school with her slate and books under her left arm, and a few pebbles in her right hand. When she saw the green guavas in my hand, she begged me to give them in exchange for her pebbles. The guavas were too tender to taste pleasant and were not fit to be eaten, but selfish to the core, as I then was, without answering the girl, I retreated indoors. I think it was two years after this incident, when we were in some other quarter of Black Town, that one of the periodical outbreaks of cholera carried off Jeya. This, however, was neither the first, nor the last nor even the worst instance of my unfeelingness, the remembrance of which tortures me to this day.

Jeya's passing away was the first remembered occasion of death and mourning in my life. I followed my mother when she went to see the

dead. The body, draped in white with arms folded on the breast, lay on a bench quite motionless and still. The eyes were closed as if in slumber. I was half frightened and half amused by the scenes of lamentation I witnessed. The kinswomen and familiar friends two or three at a time formed a circle with the bereaved mother, each with her arms round the necks of her two nearest neighbours and with heads inclined over one shoulder, they marched slowly round and round joining the chief mourner in her lamentations, much like playing, "Sally, Sally, water," only with no Sally in the centre, and wailing replacing song. This kind of mourning, I have seen only in Madras and only among Roman Catholics. My sister Emmie was none of the emotional sort and in this she was the direct antipodes of the mother whom she resembled so much. Once she asked my father, whether the copious tears shed by the sympathisers were all genuine, even if the sight of death and the poignant grief of the bereaved could naturally move a heart. My father expressed his own personal belief which, however, was not based on any known instance, that the good women, before they set out, must have coated their fingers with pepper powder in order to rub it into their eyes to induce tears, just as they entered the house of the dead. I wonder if he meant it seriously.

This topic reminds me of a still more curious kind of mourning seen several years later in Madras. It was a Hindu funeral procession going or rather running on the road. The dead man

must have been a considerable member of his own community in life, considering the size of the procession, the splendour of the bier, where the framework was so covered with tassels of gold thread and with garlands of white and yellow crysanthamums and red oleanders, that it looked like a chariot of blossoms, and also from the fact that all along the route they tossed handfuls of coins for the poor to gather up. The bearers appeared tipsy with drink, from the way they danced as they proceeded at too quick a pace for a funeral, and as shouts of "Govinda, Govinda", arose every now and then from masculine throats, one cannot forget the sight of the professional mourners. These shaggy headed witches, who were hired and paid to weep at funerals, if the relatives of the dead were rich enough to engage them, must have long exhausted their store of tears, for on this occasion, at every cry of "Govinda", they stroked the breast and arms of the dead and turned and smote their own breasts as if in unutterable anguish but not a tear drop glistened in those false eyes.

But I have diverged too far from my subject. There were other neighbours, too, whom I have not as yet introduced. One was the family of Sheik Modeen, a former Subadar or Havildar, an ex-military man. I remember him, an old man with a white skull cap and cotton chequered *lungi*, bare backed, foot bandaged, and reclining on the *pial*, enjoying his *bhang* all the live-long day. His lady was black with conspicuous red lips coloured with *pan*, and two rows of jet

black teeth stained after a quaint old notion of Muslim beauty treatment. She wore a bust bodice, that was according to Muslim custom insufficient to cover the breasts fully, and she had strings and not hooks or buttons, to fasten it on. The other parts of her costume, the same used by all members of her community, were a skirt and a white drapery, that could be drawn over the head as a veil. Even among the poor Mohammadans who lived in our neighbourhood, there were women who could afford to observe the *purdah*; if at all they stirred out from their houses to visit friends and relatives, they did so in a party under the escort of a man after nightfall. A long white robe thrown over the head and reaching down to the ankles, with two holes for the eyes, covered the whole figure, dress and all, giving the demure woman the aspect of a spectre. As this mantle was not sewn up in front and was held together only with the hand, there was no hindrance for free breathing. Elderly women, who had to leave the privacy of the house in daylight, also adopted the *burka*. But Raheem Bi, Sheik Modeen's wife, was one of the few privileged women who went about where they liked, without concealing their features.

In after years, listening to my mother's gossip, I understood that Raheem Bi was not Muslim born. She was a caste Hindu girl in one of the cantonment stations, where Sheik Modeen's unit was stationed and had been abducted by her sepoy. But they were an affectionate old couple, who had lost an only daughter and were now rearing

her child, a young girl of twelve, named Hussanara. Raheem Bi traded in home-made confectionery, her chief customers being the drivers of the Corporation carts, who went their morning rounds, collecting the garbage of the dust-bins into their tumbrils. She made flakes of soft, round and snow-white cakes, which she called *sutriyas*.

Raheem Bi was one of my mother's favourite chums. Long after we had left her neighbourhood, she never failed to pay her respects to us as long as we resided in Madras, and during the season of festivities ending the long Ramzan fast every year, she duly brought us our share of the nice things, a large glass of jaggery syrup, and a large packet containing split and roasted *kadalai purp*—Bengal gram—puffed maize and hard little balls of red and white in sugar, all mixed up.

Hussanara seemed to me to be a very big woman. She used to be always in dirty clothes, so faded that one could not say what colour they originally were. She observed the *purdah* and spent her spare time standing behind the doors of the gate, shutting them almost fully, except for a narrow slit to apply one eye and gaze on the street scenes. If she saw a man passing by, or if a visitor was making towards her own house, she would fly from her vantage and run indoors to hide herself.

I do not know the name of another family that lived close to us. Here also there were an elderly couple, who seemed to be much better

off than Sheik Modeen's folks. I recall the old gentleman in white drawers, a white shirt and a white skull cap. He had white side-whiskers too and in colour was fairer than Sheik Modeen. The lady, short and plump, wore skirts and draperies very popular with Mohammadans in those days and used by no other community. These peculiar prints can still be seen worn by women not much affected by education or fashion. The couple had a son named Yusouff, who looked very tall and big and was growing mustachios too, which made me think he was quite old, though he could hardly have been twenty. Yusouff's usual dress was a bright coloured *lungi*, with squares like a Highland tartan's on it, a striped shirt, creaking shoes with turned up toes, and a fez cap. Indeed, old men, young men, and boys among the Muslims were never to be seen with uncovered heads even at home, probably due to the fact that almost all had clean shaven scalps.

Well, Yusouff used to lift Davy on to one great shoulder and Harry to the other and prance about like a horse. He made paper doyles for us all. He used to be in the party of Muslims who, whenever there occurred a severe outbreak of cholera or small-pox, would go about from street to street after sundown, chanting hymns and marking the houses of relatives and friends with some fragrant liquid—probably sandal paste diluted in water—for the angel of death to pass over. Yusouff never failed to bring the prayer party to our house, wherever that might be, in the course of our constant shiftings, and to leave the

mark of protection on the door with a splash of the liquid.

Before closing my history of this family, I must necessarily mention an incident, of which though I was unaware then, I heard later on. Yusouff seemed to have had an elder brother Dawood drafted to serve in the Boer War. One day a letter was received from Mauritius, and as the father happened to be out, the anxious mother brought the letter to us to read and explain the contents to her. My mother who could not read English to the extent of making out the contents of a letter, took it to my father, who informed her that Dawood was lying dangerously ill of enteric at Mauritius. When my mother carried the message to her friend, the poor woman seems to have burst into deep wailings as if the son had been actually dead. "He is only ill; why all this panic?" my mother asked her. "No, (ma) by this time my son is dead. I shall never see my boy again." With that she gave way to inconsolable grief and went home. Later on, a Khaji or some other Muslim ecclesiastic was consulted; he tried crystal gazing in a basin of water and described the scene of a native sepoy lying dead, and two comrades standing, one at his head and one at his foot. The next day or so, an official report brought the news of the young man's death.

I used to play with a lot of other urchins rolling about in the dust and dirt of the lane, all like little piggiwigs. I just recollect the names of a few friends, but whose children they were I

do not know. There were Alice and Polly, and Sam, Guffur and Pyari, Muslim boy and girl; then Mangalam and Bala. Our chief pastime was to pretend we were the *apakarchi*—a woman who baked and sold *oppers*. We piled up little cones of sand and making a depression at the peak, spat into it. Then the top came off in the shape of a pie into our fingers and we arranged these mud cakes as an *apakarchi* is supposed to pile her *oppers*. We would often squat on the sand banging at our toy drums till one mother or another came and boxed our ears for spoiling our dresses and dragged us indoors.

I have never known a time when my father and mother were not at loggerheads. Where each on his or her own part could make a little sacrifice, or overlook the failings of the other, they were both fiercely and bitterly determined to go each their own way and denounce the other and God alone knows what the children endured. My mother was no admirer of the Eurasians. The native women with whom she associated were not her equals in social rank or refinement, but my mother could easily cast off her advantages and sink to their level instead of giving them some of her own enlightenment. My father's highest ambition was to convert ours into a Eurasian family. It would not have presented an insuperable difficulty at all if all had worked with a will; for anybody with a smattering of English, an English costume and an Anglicised name could pass off for a Eurasian and none be aware of it except relatives and

former friends. Indeed, if you want to be accurate in the definition of the term, Eurasian, you will be landed in utter bewilderment. If colour be the basis, then it is only a few who are indistinguishable from pure blooded Europeans. Blood would be a most unreliable test; for if anything could indicate the relative proportions of European and native blood, it must be the skin and this we saw is quite misleading. I suppose it is the costume which stood for the symbol all these years. At present most Indian men wear hats without the least intention or desire to identify themselves with Eurasians and some even keep to the Indian costume wearing a hat only as a sunshade. But at the time of which I am speaking, nobody could have believed that India, conservative, caste ridden, superstitious and prostrate India, could within two or three decades be transformed beyond recognition by the fire of the national movement. In those days, why, even till after the War was over, the Eurasians, not the exceptional few, but those whom one commonly met everywhere, seemed to hold that every hat-wallah of them, however poor and shabby, belonged to the governing class, and as such could with perfect impunity worry or insult natives, however superior to themselves in culture, financial position and even in colour. Since it is a matter of common experience that the hat was a passport to many advantages and privileges in the services and business matters, there is no wonder that among Christians, mostly the non-caste converts, those who wanted

profitable and good opportunities for rising, became Anglo-Indians.

Among our neighbours in Black Town, there were some Eurasian families who lived in expensive style with many domestics and perhaps a carriage or two. Even those who could not keep a big establishment were able to employ one or two servants, since in those days Eurasians, even if they lived from hand to mouth, were very particular not to touch even in their own houses some kinds of work which they regarded as demeaning to themselves and proper only for natives. When the general temperament was such, it was pitiable to see the condition of a great many, too poor to employ an ayah or chokra, but wanting to look superior all the same. I have seen numbers of them trying to be exclusive, affecting not to know Tamil, or speaking the language with an exaggerated foreign accent and treating anybody in Indian costume with marked condescension; for in their eye the Indian dress was the costume of the servants of the ruling class. But the curious fact remains that wherever personal acquaintance existed, the Eurasians dropped their affectations and condescension and could be quite nice to their native friends. But it was their general conduct all these decades that made them so odious and provoked uncomplimentary remarks as to their origin. Perhaps, in fairness to this community it might be admitted that the average native I have known of the pre-Vandematiram period was a hat-worshipper and a self-made slave, dropping

a servile salaam to every Tom, Dick and Harry and encouraging them in their supercilious attitude.

My father, therefore, counting on all the advantages of a hat, tried to Anglicize us all. This attempt only resulted in aggravating the tension already existing. Though my mother was not 'English educated', if she had only wished it, she could have easily picked up enough English for ordinary conversation with so many Eurasians in the neighbourhood and with an atmosphere of English culture at home. But she preferred to remain ignorant and even what one cannot help learning under such circumstances in spite of rigid passivity, she could never be persuaded to make use of. Hence there was the curious spectacle of a household, where the father and children conversed in English and the mother and children in Tamil.

By the time that Willie Dharma Rao was born, I was no longer a small child. All my sisters were wearing *thavannies* and studying at Northwick; Davy and Harry were attending the Christian College; uncle Purushotham had long given up his studies; aunt Krupa had finished her L. M. P. course in the Medical College. She had not stayed with us for various reasons during her studies, but was putting up with the parents of her brother-in-law. She would often call at ours and take the girls to her room and give us outings generally to the beach. As my sisters were usually in the boarding, and I being the family pet, was kept too long without being sent to school, she always found me available and

also she liked to make an exhibition of me. I remember how she used to dress my hair, put on me one of her own pretty *sarees* small as I was, and take me out for walks. She had always some nice things to give me, peppermints, lozenges and Indian sweets. My uncle Martin's people also made much of me and turned my giddy head with notions of being some extraordinary personage. In this family all the men in their several jobs were taken as Anglo-Indians, and all the children dressed in English costume attended Bishop Corrie's school or Doveton College. Only the ladies wore *sarees*.

I was a spoilt child. They would not even put me to studies, and I would have remained a downright idiot, but for what I eagerly learnt while the others were at their lessons. But I seldom felt dull, as I could always play with other girls of my own age. They were not meant to be educated, but married off as soon as they were thirteen or fourteen, while they gave up going to school by the time they were twelve. Our house was full of toys. We always had nice playthings. I used to love the minute and lovely red clay kitchen sets, which were complete with stove, mill-stone, pots and pans and dishes and lids selling about two dozens for a pice—quarter anna. If anything could be sweeter or lovelier, it was the *seppoory*, each set arranged like a pyramid in a rope suspender that hung from the hawker's pole. How thrilling were the brilliant colours, red, blue, green, yellow, purple and others!

My friends and I usually gave imaginary dinners, our *palagarams*, *pulavs* and *kitchries* being only bits of paper, cotton, wool and such indigestible articles. But we did enjoy cooking and serving these imaginary banquets. Sometimes the stuff would be the peelings of vegetables and the stalks of herbs after the leaves had been picked off, fetched from the kitchen refuse. We had a really grand feast on the day that Madras celebrated the Coronation of Edward VII. The courses were sugar-candy, fruits, *kadalai purp*, *batani* (peas) and other things which children love. Our doll-house, which was only a corner of the bed-room, was decorated with garlands of real flowers and paper flowers without stalks nailed to the wall.

Before long, Willie made himself a nuisance to us all. He had learnt to transport himself wherever he pleased, first propelling himself on his stomach, then on all fours till he had found his feet. He would ruthlessly seize our favourite toys and spoil all our games. If he wanted a thing, it had to be given away immediately. I have seen very few children yelling so vehemently and so continuously, hour after hour, keeping up the shrieks and screams at the same pitch till the object was realised and not otherwise. As an infant he could never tolerate being laid down on a mat or put in his cradle unless fast asleep. As the parents indulged him in his clamours, though I had often wished he would burst his lungs, he was ready with a piercing howl for everything. In summer, the worst crop of prickly-heat, experienced

by any of us, appeared on this chap's' body, and my mother was on special duty during those fearful days of heat, sitting up day or night fanning and scratching him, a job of which we were soon tired in helping mother. Poor mother, when it concerned the physical sufferings of her children, how patient and tender she used to be! Willie preferred to ride in somebody's arms even after he had learnt to walk. Whenever I swore at him for being such a troublesome fellow, my mother would rebuke me saying, that I was just as troublesome, and more if possible, when I was a baby myself.

Willie was more attached to our servant, Chellie, than even to my mother. He followed her everywhere clinging to her *saree*, and if she sat down grinding the curry stuff, would stand behind her leaning on her back, with his chubby arms clasping her neck, and swaying to and fro, with the rocking of her body. Chellie's own baby, whom she used to bring with her, would be deposited in some corner of the house, and this little brat's squealing, as he propelled himself on his haunches, for as yet he could not walk, was the limit for me. I used to pinch the poor fellow cruelly with all the wretched vindictiveness that I was capable of, but that only worsened the situation. The moment Chellie picked up her own child and sat him astride on her hip, preparing to go home after finishing her work, Willie would shake the house with his yells and had to be forcibly held back to allow her to go. To dodge him and make her

escape unseen, she had to invent a new device each day.

But though he might otherwise be busy, doing mischief or playing, Willie knew by some infernal instinct the time for the servant's departure, and would be on the look out. For a long time after she had gone, he would be disconsolate and would wander about the house calling, "Kannu, Kannu", for her. At the time of her return, he would faithfully watch on the threshold, to greet her, and hold out his arms to her. The fond creature used to hug him to her bosom, calling him, "*en kannai*," (my eye), "*en ponnai*," (my gold), "*en pachay kiliyai*" (my green parrot), and other endearing names and stroked his cheek, and cracked her knuckles on her own cheek, by way of kissing him. Because, Chellie used to call the boy "Kannai", his name for her was Kannu. Willie's welcome to my father as the latter returned home was fraught with expectations. A small packet of lozenges, biscuits or sweets were the usual reward for this filial affection.

In one of the houses where we lived, there was in the front room a curious kind of staircase, leading nowhere, and covered with red glazed paper. In my subsequent experiences, I have noticed such galleries in some of the houses with Hindu occupants and they were evidently meant for the display of the ornamental treasures of the house, the picture frames with grotesque paintings of legendary heroes and heroines, images and statuettes of gods and goddesses and other

ornamental pieces. Our gallery was utilised to no such purpose except for holding things that required to be handy, but above the top in the wall, there was a mantle-piece containing the timepiece and some glass things. Willie and I climbed the gallery up and down the whole day long, imagining that the staircase was leading to some mysterious floor.

Willie had a nasty habit of chucking into the street gutter everything that came to his hands, the more systematically, the more he saw how it annoyed us. If pencils and rubbers and toys were missed, one could be almost certain where to look for them; for the gutter ran right under the *pial*, tempting the little fellow to drop things into it. Unless the articles were retrieved in time, they were appropriated by those boys whose chief pastime seemed to be to scour the gutters for choice treasures. My property was the worst to suffer in this way and I really hated Willie for his vandalism and used to be exceedingly jealous of him, when my sisters coming home made an idol of him.

I do not know how old I was when I saw the People's Park (the Madras Zoo) for the first time in my life, as far as my memory goes. There was an elephant in the zoo in those days where there has been none since then to the time of my writing these memoirs. I was astounded at the sight of an animal so big and observed him carefully from a safe distance, tearing a cocoanut frond into bits and carrying them into his mouth with the trunk, absolutely

unaffected by the presence of visitors rudely watching his meal. There was a rhino, too, which I thought lived in a large well ; for the place where he was kept was enclosed by a circular wall, the top of which was just on a level with my eyes. Father had taken only me to the zoo ; he used to prefer my company to that of any other child's, poor deluded man ; for, I was his pet to the last. We had bananas to feed the rhino, but when my father tried to give him one, the greedy brute showed such impatience to get the fruit poking his snout here and there over the wall with such terrible grunts and sniffs, looking as if he would bite off the hand which fed it, that father cleverly dodging the ugly nose slipped the fruit on the wall. I was too frightened to take my turn at the feeding and gave away my banana also to father. I cannot recollect having seen any other creature or sight during this visit to the zoo.

CHAPTER V

MORE ABOUT CHILDHOOD DAYS

I cannot understand why people should change houses constantly. I know we did. It was from one part of Black Town to another that we kept shifting. The same monotonous rows of usually two-storeyed buildings relieved every now and then by a three-storeyed one or just a one-storeyed little cottage we saw everywhere, with solitary trees in all their green glory now and then, and the pot flowers on balconies and sometimes on the front verandah. The Eurasians, unless they were extremely down and out, had a better aesthetic taste than natives of the same status; for they kept their houses neat and pretty with door curtains, window curtains, pictures and ornaments, even the most abject sometimes growing at least a caladium or a canna in an old tin or wooden box. Except in the case of stylish families, in the houses where the natives struggled for accommodation, one could rarely see anything of beauty, save the snow white chalk patterns made by the damsels after they had sprinkled cool water before their doors. On the other hand, furniture, utensils and other moveable property jostled with one another for room and the chickens made themselves quite at

home in the living rooms and inner verandahs whenever they were not foraging in the street, making the house as dirty as possible and went to roost at nights under the panniers with much fuss and cackling. In the morning they were fed with moist balls of *thavudu* (grain dust) mixed with boiled rice. The Eurasians reared geese, turkey and guinea fowl.

We lived at this time in a one-floored house, belonging to the same proprietor, who owned the next one, and as such the two were not altogether separate. Our house alone had access to the front verandah, which was protected by a low parapet wall and our front door and windows opened into it. The other house had its front in a lane at right angles to ours, but one of its windows overlooking our own verandah we were tempted to peep through it and make ourselves a nuisance to our neighbours. The small lavatories more like the cubicles of a railway third class compartment than anything else, except for the open top, were not only on either side of the same partition wall, but they were also connected by a two-feet-six-inch doorway, with chains and bolts to the shutters on both sides.

It was in the family that occupied this house that I saw for the first time what step-motherism was like. Mr. Abdul Razak's late wife had left him a daughter, the seventeen year old Azeeza, who was so ragged and dirty that we took her for a servant in the beginning, more so on account of the contrast between her

and the second wife and the latter's daughter, Gulab, both of whom were fair and pretty and dressed themselves in bright and lovely colours, sparkling with tinsel, wore numerous bracelets and ear-rings of a variety of designs, besides necklaces and nose-rings of gold, and silver anklets. They had coloured slippers on their feet, lovely with embroidery work. The usual costume was a skirt of stripes, purple or orange predominating, with some curious streaks of other colours for designs, a long shirt with long sleeves, and a gauzy mantle worn over these. Gaudy costumes with shining braids and velvet slippers, one can see on women even of ordinary means among Muslims and it is only the very poor, who cannot afford to go in for at least tawdry stuffs in blazing colours and imitation gold embroidery. Muslim ladies look very attractive in their gorgeous robes, and they seem to have a partiality for pink and red in all their shades. This I have verified at least in one case. My mother purchased some pieces for us all from a hawker who came to our door. She always liked to exhibit her purchases to her friends and she told my sister who had come for a holiday that Gulab's mother was sure to admire the pink satin bought for our blouses. That afternoon, when the masters of both houses were out the usual signal was given, a tap or rattling of the chain of the lavatory partition door. The bolts were withdrawn, and stooping low under the two-feet-six-inch lintel, Mrs. Razak and company passed into our side of the building.

The usual daily visits were paid in this way; for a proper call by the front gate meant traversing at least ten yards of road, dressing up, an escort even for my mother, and for the Muslim ladies more, the *burkas* shrouding their entire figures, and because these were people of means, a *bandy* in which they had to pack themselves. However, to go back to my story, the ladies came and were thrilled by what they saw, and fulfilled my mother's prophecy by exclaiming with one voice: *Eh achcha hai; eh achcha hai* (this is pretty, this is pretty) when they saw the pink satin.

Poor Azeeza would long to come in their company and stay as long as the visit lasted, but she was always rebuked for neglecting some task or other and sent back to mind it. This unfortunate girl, dirty and shabby, did not even wear a full jacket, which even the poorest Muslim woman could not do without unless utterly destitute or elderly, when they wore the insufficient bust bodice with the strings or laces. Azeeza wore the same, and a dirty ragged skirt and a dirty ragged *thavani* or overall. Just as a servant is sent on all kinds of errands, this step-daughter was sent to our house for a little coffee powder or for red chillies or some such thing; for in Madras even among the medium middle class people, this is a nasty practice. Whenever the lean and pinched Azeeza came on one of these errands, she used to tell harrowing tales of the ill-treatment she received from her step-mother and her father's utter callousness, and all the woes of her life, but even

before she could sprint back Cinderella like, her youngest step-brother, Jaffaar, would be at her heels, summoning her back. He always used to say ; "Azeeza Bu, mother wants you to come." "Bu" means elder sister, and as Mr. Razak's children all called this girl Azeeza Bu, we also used to address her in the same way. I always used to enjoy seizing one of Azeeza Bu's long arms and swinging to and fro whenever she came to us, and when she was sent back to mind some work, I would follow her, passing through that low door-way. Poor soul ! she was most of the time cooking something. The dish which I used to notice quite often was something like curling bits of white leather or skin.

One of our windows took in a longer vista of the street than any in the other house. The first thing that Gulab did when she accompanied her mother to our house, was to rush to this window, shut it leaving only an aperture for her to look through and station herself there, for like all Muslim girls to whom the external world was closed in their home prisons, Gulab longed to see and enjoy what was going on outside. Though she looked big to me, it could not have been long since she had left off playing in the streets to take her place behind the *purdah*. She must have been quite sick at having a mischievous monkey like me at her elbow, whenever she went to that window, for though that window was there for me the whole of the livelong day, it seemed to wear a special fascination, when Gulab stationed herself

there, her pretty figure in tinkling jewels and the mantle drawn over the head as a veil. It was interesting and amusing to watch the lovely young girl's panic, when a man came across the window, for she would either shut the window with a sudden bang, or skip aside in a flurry to avoid being seen, her clothes all rustling about her. In order to see the latter performance, I would now and then take an impish delight to throw the window wide open suddenly. She would scuttle away and then fix a reproachful look on me muttering: "*Karab Bachcha*," (naughty child) under her breath.

The Razaks left their house before we did ours, but Mrs. Razak with her daughter and Chotai (small) who was Jaffaar, in his richly braided velvet cap, his white shirt with a coloured kerchief in its pocket, his brilliantly coloured *lungi* and turned up shoes, used to come to us occasionally. Azeeza Bu had died of dysentery and we used to see very little of the other two members: Mr. Razak, in his white drawers, black tweed coat with closed collar, his tall fez, the pair of English boots and his spectacles, a tall fair and inclined-to-be-thin man and his eldest son Baday (big) the first born of Gulab's mother and a senior edition of his brother Jaffaar.

Gulab's window happened to be my favourite haunt too, not only because it commanded a longer perspective but also because from here was visible a lovely green *maidan* with *korukapuli* trees growing in clumps. I do not think a nearer view would have been pleasant since the

children of that street and probably the adult males, too, used it as a public latrine. In the fruit-bearing season, the little boys and girls used to pick up the pods, even if they had dropped on a muck heap and enjoy them. Sometimes when there was a cyclone, the leaves would come whirling into our house as they were swept and borne by the wind and scatter all over the place. We used to make whistles, placing a leaf between two even and equal bits of potsherd and blowing it like a mouth-organ, the vibrations producing a note like a whistle's. I loved to gaze and gaze on those trees and imagine all sorts of pleasant things that cannot be uttered. In some particular season, a kind of beetle called the *pon vandu* (gold beetle) used to breed on *korukapuli* trees. These beetles were a great favourite with the boys, who would either catch or buy them, allow them to crawl all over their bodies or kept them in an empty match-box half filled with sand for the insect. It was a great sensation when these beetles laid eggs in the boxes.

There were other attractions, too, provided by this aperture. One of the hundred thousand pavement stalls of Madras, selling cheap cakes and pudding, or displaying the cheapest and coarsest of sweets and other eatables, was here kept by a short plump, dirty hag with neglected hair and *pan*-stained teeth. I am ignorant of her real name, but her neighbours and customers knew her only by her nickname of Kullamma (midget). Her chief pastime as she presided over her counter watching for customers was to dig into her

untidy hair for lice, spit all over the place where she sat, try to flick the flies off her wares and talk gossip with every one she could, when she was not nagging or swearing at her daughter. She wore a dirty faded *saree* but no bodice and yet she had some ornaments. The lobes of her ears were large though not descending on the shoulders like Ayah's, but they were plugged with coils of coloured palm leaf strips, each coil at best an inch across. She had tattooed *kolams* and other figures on her arms and legs and coarse dull coloured bangles so tight as to be almost embedded in her pulpy flesh. Her only other ornament was a string of black beads round her neck, from which dropped a minute ornament, which was her *thali* or wedding pendant.

Now for the wares displayed in her stall: it was just what we see in the thousands of pavement stalls: slices of sweet melon, bits of boiled yam, one-pie heaps of boiled as well as broiled sweet potatoes, little heaps of peas and monkey-nuts roasted and boiled, bananas, cocoanut toffee, sugar sweets of all shapes, colours and sizes, balls of puffed maize, beaten rice *payir*, sugar-cane and such things. These wares were exposed to the dust raised by every wind and by the street traffic. I do not know what Kullamma's husband was, but the only impression I carry of him is that of a vicious looking knave, in a dirty coarse red *lungi*, knee length, with long hair except for a U-shaped patch of clearing over the forehead, the hair being done up in a knot over the nape of the neck and adorned with

a chaplet of red oleanders. This fellow was usually seen stretched at full length on the *pial* lying on his face, either sleeping or bullying somebody. I could see him, since his house was only on the other side of the gutter where the stall lay.

The most useful member of the family was Kanagam, a girl about eleven years of age, with a head full of curls, which looked like tangled bunches of rusty hair-springs standing on end as if trying to stay as far from the scalp as possible, so that it seemed that even if well washed and greased to the point of dripping, no comb of whatever make could succeed in smoothing and stretching the mutinous locks to enable one to twist them into a knot. Kanagam in this respect was a living Aunt Sally. One closely observing her could not fail to notice a bit of coloured wool clinging to one stray lock and trailing on the back of the neck, where a knot was meant to have been. Kanagam's whole figure had a wild appearance, little in keeping with a patient face and a pair of mild eyes. She wore a faded and flagged old chintz skirt of non-descript colour, gathered into a bunch where the rent was worst, and tucked in at the waist. She had neither blouse nor bodice to her back, but covered her bosom in a sort of way, with a towel or a rag thrown across one shoulder with the ends tucked into the belt of the skirt in the front and back. She had a heavy nickel or lead jewel for only one anklet, and this ornament instead of gracing the part where it should

have been, clasped the leg midway, between the foot and the knee. Her hands and neck were bare, and the bores of her nose and ears, the latter of which were decent and not gaping like her mother's were plugged with cloves or bits of broom-stick, to keep the holes open, in anticipation of gold ornaments, if Kanagam were lucky enough to get them in time.

I spent a lot of pity on the young lass and cursed her mother for all the hard work given to her with no chance for playing. If she slacked a little or paused in her work to overhear a bit of gossip, or to exchange a few words with a girl friend or was diverted by some interesting street sight, she had to face a volley of maternal reproofs: "*Thodapa kattai*" (broom), "*kaludai mundai*" (widow of a donkey), and many other musical and endearing terms, which I fail to recall now, came out with an explosion followed by: "You wretched hussy, if you play these pranks in your mother-in-law's house, I promise you will have the time of your life there," and ended her eloquence appropriately with a vicious snapping of her fingers at her daughter by way of a curse. These marks of maternal displeasure had an instantaneous effect in goading the girl into vigorous action again.

As for Kullamma's partiality, I felt, it was inexcusable. But she was only one of millions of Indian mothers, who regard daughters as cheap and common stuff and their sons as objects to fuss about, especially if one happens to be the only son or the baby of the family.

The preference is shown quite openly. In this case there was an only son and though the only daughter did not count for much, Murgesa, the younger brother of Kanagam, a black naked little imp, who was always wiping the constantly running nose on the back of his hand, whenever he was not sniffing or snuffling was the pet and idol of the family. He had a close cropped head, with a clean shaven U over the forehead like his father's and as the best of everything was lavished on the son, he had gold ear-rings and a pair of wire or tube silver anklets. The whole livelong day he exercised his precious jaws on all kinds of trash and spent his time care free, playing tip-cat marbles and tops, and for a change running after every passing carriage to hang on to the dickey and shout: "*Pinnalay chowk pode*" (crack your whip behind), and dodging the irate coachman's swinging whip, like a grinning young baboon, pleased at his own smartness.

Whereas Kullamma had nothing but scoldings for her useful daughter, except at such times when she seized the girl's head in a deadly grip to scour the bushy matted hair for lice, administering a box, if Kanagam showed any signs of impatience, she lavished all her affection in petting and coddling her hideous looking son. The young brat would often leave off a game in the middle suddenly, and run and tumble into his mother's lap, holding his palm to her lips for a share of the *pan*, in the process of mastication in her mouth. Not till she had pushed a little of the stuff with the tip of her tongue, would he spare her

or go back to play. It provoked me dreadfully to see the little wretch as much caressed as his sister was neglected. At meal time, the choicest bits after the father's portion was selected, were Murgesa's by right, and Kanagam who was meant to qualify herself for all the future drudgery, economies and privations of a daughter-in-law in a mother-in-law's house, had to satisfy herself with whatever was left of the dishes, which she had taken so much pains to cook. In the mornings, the mother used to hold a rusty tin mug in her hand containing cold rice and curry, dripping with gravy, which looked red with chillie stuff and call for her idiot boy, already at his marbles or tip-cat on the road. He would come running up in haste and gobble up one great ball after another from the maternal hand, the nose the worse for his haste, and the irritation of the condiments.

While Kullamma undertook no heavier tasks than squatting behind the counter, or going to the market for the daily supplies of the house and for the replenishing of her stock, the burden of the household duties fell on the shoulders of Kanagam. She had to fetch water from the nearest public tap, which she did in typical Madras fashion, poising on the hip, with her arm holding it in its place, a big brass water pot with a ridiculously small mouth and carrying a *chembu* (tiny brass or bronze pot) in her disengaged hand. The young maid had to dust and sweep the house, the *pials* and steps, and the portion of the street in front of the house, and sprinkle water

either mixed with cow-dung or simply plain on the swept area of the road, which she decorated with gleaming *kolams*. I suppose the cottage was too small to hold all the necessary equipment, judging from the fact that a number of earthen cooking pots and pans, the grinding stones and some sundry things, found accommodation on the road under the *pials* with the stray dogs as well as poultry committing nuisance on them.

Kanagam had a respite following the early morning duties before preparations for dinner began. The poor drudge of a daughter sat with a bowl of cold rice soaked in *conjee* and salted to taste. She had no curry with dripping gravy, but as she carried the food to her mouth, with her right hand, she took a bite for a relish from a long green chillie or an onion which she held in her left. Her next task was evidently the grinding of curry stuff. She sat on a low stool with a *chembu* of water to wash the stone, and a clay saucer containing the raw materials which would soon be reduced into soft balls by her skilful hands and go back to the tray. She ground chillies, turmeric, coriander, onions and garlick, and for special curries: cocoanuts, coriander leaf and fresh ginger.

One of the low storeyed houses opposite to ours was occupied by an all black Eurasian family, the Daniels. What Papa Daniel was I do not know, but he was regularly going out and returning home which showed that he had a billet somewhere. I remember him in a dirty frayed out

khaki suit, which seemed too loose for his limbs, and at all times of the day when he left the house, he wore the only head gear he probably had, an evening cap. His shoes must have seen veteran service in company with his clothes, as they retained no particular shape or colour, except the impression of decay. Papa Daniel had a slight stoop on his back and a slouching gait in his walk. He was known to be a toper, but all the same he was usually a quiet-going and non-interfering man and never created a row in the house as far as I am aware. When he was at home he would often stand on the *pial*, heron-like on one leg, while he rested his other on the stone sofa of the verandah close by, puffing away at his pipe dreamily. The sight of the landlord, however, would rudely scatter his dreams and send him scuttling indoors, while Douglas or Hector answered the unwelcome visitor's knock with a "Papa, not at home". The landlord would leave with a threat of serving notice on account of undue accumulations of arrears of house rent.

Mamma Daniel, with a sallow faded complexion, was small and thin and prematurely wrinkled. In those far off days, Memsahibs wore long skirts with a few flounces behind and a little train, which the ladies themselves made a pretty device to keep from trailing on the ground. It was a common sight, the ladies going about with a fan in one hand, and a part of the skirt, usually some black or dark blue stuff, gathered in the other. The blouses were generally snowy white muslin or some other white liden with high collars,

plain or laced and sometimes with frills on the yoke, and long sleeves that terminated in frills or cuffs. Mamma Daniel's costume, however, as I remember it, was a soiled white wrapper with red or black stripes. It had no decorations by way of frills or cuffs. She looked pinched and to add to the other disadvantages to her appearance, she had lost a frontal tooth, and her hair, after the fashion of those days, was brushed back smoothly behind and done up in a pad on the top of her head. I never saw her go to church. At home she was always bare footed, and even when taking short walks in front of her house on the road, she had no footwear. Only, when she went to market, she fished out an old rickety pair of shoes and put them on. But even to market, she seldom wore a hat.

The children were all ragged, but the two senior ones had some footwear for school. They were Douglas, Hector, Sybil, Johnny—whom I hated for being a cry baby—and the last, Baby Percy. Douglas and Hector played tops on the road. Percy with his eternally running nose was always perched in his mother's arms; Sybil liked to play the mother with Percy, whenever he was not thus mounted. She would fetch an old rusty tin and pretend to pour water on the baby's head, as if she were giving him a wash and treated the little fellow, more or less like a plaything. Johnny black as cobra polish was always peevish and was little inclined to play. Soon after rising from bed in the mornings, he would squat on the stone sofa of the *pial* with his back to the

wall of the house, in an outgrown wrapper that made no effort to cover his black loins as he sat with drawn up knees and howled like a pack of fiends till he got an *opper* or an *idiapam*. Each time a vendor of cookies passed by, and his mamma failed to buy him some pasty, his yells were loudest. From cockcrow till night the streets would be ringing with the cries of sellers of wares of innumerable kinds, not the least of which were delicacies for *chota*. I suppose the Daniel family had cold rice in the morning and Johnny being indulged in babyhood with the cookies sold in the streets, had no intention to give them up and share the family diet. Hence not until Mamma stopped one of the vendors and bought a titbit for her cry baby did the morning tempest cease. The other children hung about Johnny, for a share, but he would never give any, while Mamma broke a small piece and gave it to Baby Percy.

Sybil was exactly my age and liked to play with me, but before the two families came into contact, her mother's angry voice, "Bella, don't play with the native," would summon her away. Nevertheless, 'Bella's' disobedience and the close neighbourhood, perhaps, soon wore away the prejudice, and every day one or the other of the children would come running to my mother with the request, "Mamma wants some tamarind", or "Mamma wants the strainer," and many of the things that Mamma wanted, had no end. Loans of small amounts were often applied for but these were never given.

Black Douglas and blacker Hector were as mischievous as budding bullies could be, and whenever their animal spirits were not diverted into playing games, like tops and marbles and leap-frog, they took to shying stones at pedestrians, chiefly those carrying burdens, themselves concealed behind a door or wall. Their special victim was the small thin old man with the goatee, who used to pass along the street with a large basket tray on his head, announcing his wares crying, "*samia, puttu*". I can still see the harassed little old man, with the skin dropping loose on his spare limbs, in his knee length faded russet *dhoti*, his big white turban and his coarse sandals of hide which used to make a curious noise, as he shuffled about. I can still see these two mischievous boys, in their dirty frayed out and patched up knee-breeches and coats, performing all the antics one sees in their alleged ancestors, going into ecstasies whenever a stone hit the mark, and shouting "Niggers", "monkeys", at the injured.

In the same row in which we lived, some three or four doors to the left resided Mrs. Daniel's sister with her family. One could scarcely be convinced of the relationship, even after receiving enlightenment. Mrs. Carr's colour was a rich cream, and as if the skin alone did not make all the difference in the world between the two sisters, the elder was a plump benevolent looking matron, with her hair most of the time in paper curls, while she dressed more neatly, in more up-to-date gowns and though she seldom wore a hat, whenever she tripped over to her sister's house, she still

draped her round shoulders with a shawl of tartan squares and had on her feet felt slippers, with low heels like tennis shoes. Mr. Carr, from the occasional glimpses I had of him, was a ferocious looking man, with a florid face and military bearing, as he sat in his pyjamas and shirt, smoking a pipe on the front verandah of his house. According to rumours, he had his work at Calcutta or Bombay but had left his family at Madras, probably because he was a pure blooded Englishman, who had allied himself with Eurasians by marriage. There were three children, the eldest being about fifteen and all very handsome, so that between them and their first cousins the Daniels, there was nothing to show an approach to kinship.

The Carrs could not have been in affluent circumstances. Papa Carr was always seen only in his pyjamas and slippers, and the younger children Abel and May were bare footed except when they went to school, or church, while no Eurasian, who could afford a full dress would let others and especially natives see him in such a homely costume in those days—only recently gone by. Hilda, the eldest, who had already begun to put up her hair, and wear ankle length skirts, did most of the house work, helping her mother to cook, and doing all the washing and the cleaning, and as her hands were usually greasy and her apron smutty, she seldom showed herself out except in the cool of the evening, when she washed and dressed herself and with plenty of powder on her face and high-heeled shoes on her

feet and a fan in her hand, made her dainty appearance to take short walks on the road or to pay calls, with a stiff and formal air. Abel was a merry cheerful lad and spent most of his play time, driving a hoop or climbing lamp posts and doing all kinds of gymnastics. May, the youngest, was another pretty girl, but not so fair as her father or Hilda. Like Abel, she took after her mother. She wore long sleeved knee length smocks or frocks with a tight fitting bodice and flounces at the waist. She used to race with her brother driving her own hoop, with hair-streaming behind her.

CHAPTER VI

'CHRIST IS THE HEAD OF THIS HOUSE''

WHILE they lost no time in putting the older girls to school, it did not seem to have occurred to my parents that a school education was necessary for me also. I was definitely the spoilt child of the family. But once I did actually go to school, when I was little more than a toddler, due to the importunities of the authorities, reinforced by the entreaties of the conductress, I believe. I went weeping the whole length of the way, Mary accompanying me, while we halted at every place, where the conductress picked up other girls in ones and twos, to escort them all to school. It must have been a very small institution. I remember nothing about the school itself, except that a line of young cocoanut trees, growing within the walls of the enclosure, swept the street *pials* with their drooping graceful fronds, and dropped the young nuts just forming which looked like acorns in their cups. When school broke up and I stepped out, I was greeted by Harry, waiting at the gate, with a flute made out of a leaflet of the palm frond, which he presented to me. Boys and girls never spare cocoanut leaves when they can get at them.

which is chiefly in marriage pandals, where they are used for a decoration with laden plantain trees, and other bowers erected for celebrating other festivals. Never had Harry been so gracious to me in all his life, as on the first day of my schooling.

Before long, I had begun to look for the advent of the conductress with eagerness and pleasure; not that I cared to read the tiresome, "ah, aahs, e, ees," or to spell out, "S. O.: So", "G. O.: Go", and so on, but there were positive attractions for me in the business. Nor should I fail to mention a great horror that awaited me every morning, in the shape of a bear-hug accorded to me by two twin-sisters in white dresses, with clean shaven heads—the result of some pilgrimage to pay a vow, I believe—and cold and clammy arms. Much to my aversion, I was caressed by all the big girls, the biggest of whom could not have been more than ten years' old. But these two sisters were the limit. They were my Scylla and Charybdis. What delighted me was the walks and visits to the houses of other girls whom we were picking up all along the way. There was one house, which stood on a small green, where the grass grew and waved its feathery plumes in the breeze. This was an earthly paradise for me, and I loved to gather handfuls of the plumes much to the amusement of the conductress and the other pupils. Then there were the roadside pavement stalls, kept by cronies, displaying lollypops and toffee of innumerable attractive shapes and colours. I was never allowed to take any

pocket money when I went out, but I eagerly watched the other girls buying, and begged for a share, accepting without the least scruple the bits taken out of a girl's mouth. One of the bigger girls, Soruna, was my heroine, why I cannot explain now. Perhaps she was the best looking of the lot, for I have always been a votary at the shrine of the goddess of beauty. Or, it may be because she could turn her upper eyelids inside out. I marvel at my own ignorance in those days, when I had not the faintest notion, that all our destinations did not lie on one identical route. As we returned from school, Soruna parted from us midway, where another road branched off, and I used to run after her begging the conductress who summoned me or dragged me back, to take me home by “ Soruna's ” road.

A grave calamity in my view put an abrupt end to my schooling after perhaps a couple of weeks. I was always fond of pretension and loved to be seen with English books in my hand. Not content with making a show at home, I would take the books with me to school. One particular book was, however, my favourite, having on one cover a most beautiful spray of lovely flowers and on the other, the picture of a lady. The pages soon disappeared, but the covers with their lovely pictures were treasured and exhibited. One day, I was in the sewing class, I suppose, the bigger girls were having a lesson in needlework, or the teacher was minding her own private business,

though what we little girls were there for, I cannot make out. The teacher for her own occupation had brought her needlework basket, which proved to be my own undoing. Older people know, without a special investigation, what any needlework basket would usually contain. Such was not my case, and besides, I was an extraordinarily inquisitive person in those days. I imagined all sorts of mysteries to be present in unexplored boxes and baskets. My mischievous hand extricated some pieces of brown paper, which actually happened to be the pattern for a blouse. While I was making a curious examination, the girl who sat next to me, without the least warning, snatched it from my hand, and I instinctively pulled it back, so that between us both we tore the pattern into shreds.

Then came the severest whacking I ever had in my life. Who that teacher might be, where she may be, or whether in the land of the living is more than I can know. Her very features are obscure. But she shall be remembered in my biography, for the merciless thrashing she gave me—and the other girl too, but that did not count for much with me. How I cried and sobbed and writhed under her cane and accused the 'other' girl of being the sole culprit! But nothing could appease her truculence, till her own hands ached with the beating. As if not content with the cruel stripes she gave me, she confiscated my beloved pictures and chucked them into a high niche in the wall and I never saw them again. Even after that

whenever the thought of the ruined patterns came into her mind, she took up the cane and laid it on me. Breaking up time came, and I went home sobbing all the way partly for the smarting pain and partly for the loss of my pictures. I dreaded to go back to school. When my father heard of this, he put an end to my school studies, and went and had a violent quarrel with the savage mistress.

For long years after this incident, the question of my education was not viewed with any seriousness. The boarding school which was deemed good enough for my sisters, was an unsuitable place for a pet like me. Having long hours at my disposal to spend in idleness and being of a thoughtful disposition, I began to form impressions of every one's character in the family, in a way I might not have done, had I not been left so much to myself. I think, I distinctly remember each nook and corner, every window and doorway, nay, the very pictures and ornaments that adorned the walls of the house, where the serpent, the dragon, who had beguiled my mother before, sought her out again. I seem to see the very pictures before me now, a portrait of William Miller of the Christian College, coloured prints of Queen Victoria, Edward VII and Queen Alexandra, besides a number of group photos, a quaint representation of the Trinity, "A true likeness of our Saviour," and the crucifixion. The most prominently placed frame, however, seemed to stand there as an object of mockery ; for in a house where

godliness was a stranger, the beautiful motto contained these lines :

Christ is the Head of this house
The unseen Guest at every meal.
The silent Listener of every conversation.

Downright paganism and the most outspoken hostility to the spirit of Christianity could not dishonour Christ so much, as meaningless wall texts, unprofitable church going and muttering mechanical prayers or Scripture reading with a dead spirituality in heart. Even when my father prayed in all sincerity, and with a breaking heart, often it was always pleading with God to take away the many sorrows and troubles, without giving up on his part, his own contribution for these troubles. Indeed, he never admitted or recognised any of his words and acts, or any part of his policy as alienating the good will of even the best of us, and making peace impossible unless every one consented to be treated as toys or performing animals; on the other hand, he had a justification for every aspect of his attitude and was quite sure he was able to explain his conduct to his God. Everybody who thwarted him thought they could also explain. So it looked as if God had left him to solve his own problems with his own resources; for how can even God Almighty help, if He is not allowed to exercise His own wisdom, but only asked to give a backing to man in the policy he chooses to adopt?

As for my mother, she was fond of singing Christian hymns and lyrics in Tamil; tell us and

also her friends Bible stories and go to church and be sure of a place in heaven while all the time she was doing acts of shame before the all-seeing eyes of her Maker. There was not the least intention to honour Christ with her heart and conduct, by putting away the guilt from her soul, never the least desire to desist from telling lies and falsehoods, be the circumstances what they may. She would talk about others as she liked—and a great many of them were certainly better than herself—criticised and condemned them mercilessly, but would fall like a raging storm on the son or daughter, who pointed out similar failings in her own conduct. That any one should dare to say, that she had faults! And then we were ungrateful wretches guilty of breaking the fifth commandment by dishonouring a parent; but evidently, the fifth commandment was not in operation, when she encouraged or drove us to dishonour the other parent by disobeying him and deceiving him. The crowning act of the whole dramatic performance came when she quoted, not Christ's sayings, but the old proverb, that necessity knows no law, and announced that under certain circumstances,—hinting at my father's treatment of her—even sins were justified. So, here was another kind of justification. When the father and mother thus justified their own conduct, it is not to be wondered that the children did the same, chiefly Emmie, my mother's special victim, and Davy. For every lie that was told, for every piece of deceit and treachery, for every act of terrorism, the responsibility

was thrown on "circumstances", or the "other" person, while God was expected to judge us, not according to His own wisdom and divine law, but according to the arguments that He heard, as if He were bound to proceed along the lines of the Indian Penal Code or any man-made law.

My pensive habit—causing me to think deeply upon every issue in life, has revealed to me a truth, which might not have been so forcibly convincing if I had only heard it from other people's lips, that so long as we are perfectly satisfied with the justness of our own words and actions, even so long do we cry in vain, to the Father in heaven to solve our problems for us, unless by a special dispensation of mercy, He does help to give us another chance to seek Him with our hearts. When we do not ask Him to show us what to do, and how to act, but insist upon maintaining, that our plan or action is so perfect, that it cannot admit of revision or improvement even at God's own hands, how can we expect Him to undertake the cure of our ills? When we place our case in the hands of an expert physician or specialist, we will never dare to ask him to undertake the treatment, without interfering with our own remedies. Either our own remedies shall be abandoned, however correct they may be in our own eyes, and we carry out the physician's instructions in all their fulness, or we forfeit his aid. But we do dare to ask the Divine Physician to cure our human ills by our own remedies; and no wonder, He

declines the responsibility, and sadly disappointed, we either say that God does not answer prayers, or that there is no God at all. I have heard many remark sarcastically: "How is one to know God's will?" Well, if there is the will to know and accept God's will, the very humility of the soul provides the condition for the revelation of that will. In a great many cases—I am speaking to Christians—one has to ask these questions: "What would Christ Himself do under these circumstances?", "How would He advise?", then the answer is furnished by the life and character of Jesus, so familiar to us all, and what Christ did or would do, will be nothing but the carrying out the Father's will. Surely, He will never say, that anything is justified by circumstances and that necessity knows no law. That is only the way we console ourselves for our wrong doings and our erring schemes. We do not ask for instructions to follow, and our prayers remain ungranted.

Well, to go back to the motto, Christ as the head of the house, had to subordinate His will to my father's dictatorship, which had no intention of taking any guidance from the Divine Master when it clashed with his own. The mother obeyed neither the earthly nor the heavenly head of the house. I refrain to comment on the children's conduct, since that was based on the example of the two parents. The Unseen Guest at every meal witnessed parsimony, selfishness and the lack of anxiety to share, even a little of the family income, no meat being given to the hungry.

The spirit was for grabbing and hoarding as much as could be obtained and spending the minimum for the needs of the family and grudging to take a share in every individual's moral responsibility for the relief of the distressed and the destitute.

Though he had his share of his father's property and lands, and had made a neat little pile of his own, by the favours of the Rajah of Dostanabad, nothing could surpass my father's anxiety, night and day to add more to his income. His private tuitions were almost killing, still he was not satisfied. In this respect, my mother was blameless, for she had a large hand which, however, was not free to give.

The Silent Listener heard lies, falsehoods, idle gossip which is hurtful to others, talking evil of one's neighbours, mocking, judging and condemning others as severely as the ease and lightness with which we excused and justified our own misdoings or even denying them. My mother in the utter deadness of holy feelings in her, used to utter the most filthy words ever spoken by the lowest of human beings and talked ribaldry, even in the presence of the children. Yet she would chide them for calling each other 'donkey,' 'monkey' and such less indecent names and say, it was her duty to correct us and bring us up in good discipline. Where her own failings were concerned, she usually comforted herself with a sarcastic remark: "As if God is going to punish us for all such trifles, knowing that we are after all weak human creatures." All this, the Silent Listener heard with shame and

sorrow torturing His heart. This was how Christ occupied His position as Head of the house and this was how He was honoured and obeyed.

What I record here are reflections of a mature age, but in those days, child as I was, I had a vague conviction, that if people really wanted to, they could keep from telling lies, refrain from deceiving others, desist from picking quarrels, control their tongues from speaking evil, refuse to hear slander and stay their wanton steps from taking the path to shame and wronging others. Am I not all this myself? I am. But thank God, I know I am in urgent need of regeneration and as there is no power in me for the upward march, seeking that power constantly from above. But we usually like to do unjust and unholy things and to cover up the hypocrisy of it all, look for excuses to justify ourselves, as if our sins did not lie in all their naked ugliness before all seeing eyes. If to do an unrighteous thing deliberately, wantonly is SIN, by what name could the crime of leading others astray be designated?

It was some years before I understood, that the words of that beautiful motto were not to be literally taken. When I was just able to make out words by spelling, I would often run out into the street to look for a sculptured head somewhere on the roof of our house, and it was not till the light departed out of my world, and I turned my eyes to heaven, out of the very necessity to keep myself alive without seeking a forced end, that the full meaning of the words

dawned upon me. The picture of the crucifixion was likewise at first a puzzle to me. How often would I stand under the frame waiting and waiting for the blood that streamed from the nailed hands and feet to drip to the floor at my feet, and what tortures I imagined the picture Christ only to be undergoing!

CHAPTER VII

JUVENILE MISCREANTS

DAVY was fast developing those traits in his character which were more serious than the ordinary pranks of school boys and which if unchecked were bound to contribute to the misery of the world. He used to do unspeakable things, which might have horrified his parents to know that a son of their's was capable of being guilty. But millions of parents in this world refuse to be convinced that their sons and daughters are anything but models for others to copy. It is their cousins who are guilty of every vice imaginable, and if the cousins are not easily forthcoming, then it is the children of the neighbours who are downright hopeless, but their own offspring are always above reproach. Davy, of course, always took the necessary precaution to avoid rousing the suspicion of the older folks and would beg his brothers and sisters not to report any particular misdeed, under the threat of either running away from home or of killing himself.

As for Harry, what he might have turned out to be under healthier circumstances I cannot say, but Davy completely dominated him and made his younger brother his disciple and his tool. Apart from the baneful effect produced on Harry

for life, Davy's leading his brother astray cost him in the end more dearly than he has known. My own experience has shown me that no man is always happy for his sins even if he refuses to admit them as sins. Either the touching of the heart by Divine grace at one time or other in his life, gives him pangs of shame and remorse at the very recollection of his wrongs to others, a thing which in familiar language is known as repentance, or something happens in his life, when another person wrongs him, as he has done his own victims and drives him to madness and despair.

Davy could indignantly deny that he was doing anything wrong, and no wonder that he had an excuse or vindication for everything that he could not altogether disclaim. Although he was keenly alive to the faults of others and loudly denounced them, he found it necessary to do his own misdeeds in secret and under various guises. He always knew how to make out a case for himself, whether his arguments convinced or failed to convince the individuals concerned. He never worried himself about that. This characteristic which he carried into later life, hardening as the years rolled by, made his cynicism towards others and his own self-justification intolerable. He was seldom hearty in his relations with those of his own sex, and never tried to conceal the sulk from his expression, in the case of a number of them especially if they happened to move freely with his sisters, or wife; but he, on his part, sought the company of other men's wives or sisters and could be quite at home with them, cut jokes

with them, confide his troubles to them, and till his marriage, behave with disgusting indecency towards them. "Other men were not to be trusted," whereas there was no such danger from him. Though his parents might have been ignorant of the facts, his sisters and brothers before our home broke up, have been witnesses of his shameful conduct towards young and innocent girls. Yet he was righteous in his own eyes. He was never happy in maturer years. He scorned to consider any advice, suggesting that he might alter his plans and policies and see, if that did not bring him more peace of mind. No, what he was doing was the one and only thing under the circumstances and he could very well do without others poking their noses into his own private affairs. But what baffled everybody's understanding was, he never kept those 'affairs' to himself, since worse than any woman who is a proverbial gossip, he was given to the broadcasting of his own private matters, and chiefly preferring women for the outpourings of his heart. Time after time, some had relayed the broadcast to others, often with exaggeration and concoction. Davy, at such times, would indignantly break off all relations with them, call them insulting names, humiliate them in the eyes of others, and once more seek the self same individuals for his confidence. In his opinion, it was not his action for giving publicity, in the first instance, to domestic troubles that was disgraceful, but the wider circulation the incidents received at the hands of others, that was offensive. Davy had

one standard for himself and another for others, but he refused to admit it. He suffered, and in maturer years, rather than own that much of his trouble was due to his own well contemplated actions, he would fiercely refute such an opinion and say, that in the world, it was the righteous who suffered and not the wicked. Such an abnormally one-tracked mind, such a staggering piece of self-righteousness, having seen with my own eyes, the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican became more real to me than a mere fable. He was always the victim and martyr and others were invariably the offenders. He did not see how many laughed behind his back for making each trifling domestic matter a thing of public concern.

Perhaps, at this stage it is too early to reflect on Davy's character after he had become a householder, but since, 'The child is the father of the man,' the traits of his boyhood, only hardened as the years passed and left him the worst type of a Pharisee. His father had acted on the conviction of his own infallibility, which, however, Davy never recognised, according to his nature of not admitting other people's claims, if they were not identical with his own. But as he could not dare to defy a patriarchal head openly, he asserted himself secretly by various subterfuges, and even this he thought was the one and only thing under the circumstance! His belief in his own infallibility, gathering strength with years, and his long experience in devising evasions of the patriarchal law, led him

during his own role as patriarch, to be always suspicious of subterfuges on the part of those under his own domination. The resulting watchfulness and iron control were so odious and hateful, that tragedies were inevitable.

The criminal turn taken by Davy's youthful exploits began with small sins before ripening into absolute moral perverseness. There are social crimes worse than a cold blooded murder, and chief of these is leading others astray. If a man is reckless about his own soul, what right has he to destroy another soul? If he cannot help a little child to love the pure and holy things in life, he is more than a dastardly criminal, who teaches the child to mock at truthfulness, obedience and honesty; he is more than a public enemy, who betrays or seduces the trusting or takes advantage of some one's frailty to make it his own pastime.

What I recall here are instances of what I am aware, which means that I am ignorant of many, many more. Davy had more than once stolen the season tickets of some boys who came from the suburbs, and resold them after a clever tampering. I was too young to understand more than this, but I remember father horse-whipping Davy, and how the latter kept on fiercely denying his guilt to the last, and shouting: "Why do you flog me, when you can't prove the charge against me?" With Davy and also with Harry, the crime was a crime only if it could be proved, not because it was committed. A neck-tie, rolled gold studs, a tie-pin, anything that could be

secretly appropriated from unwary friends, were pilfered and sold to others who were not likely to come into touch with the victims. When they were seen in his possession, and father or mother questioned him, he would naively answer that they were presents. The secret of many such 'presents' was known to Harry, but he was threatened with punishment if he gave out his elder brother. Many a time the younger children have surprised Davy hiding in a corner and hurriedly munching at a piece of red 'badam halva' or a fleshy slice of broiled fish, pieces of 'cobob' or a comfit, and when questioned how he got it, would come out with the usual answer that his friend the baker, or his friend, the restaurant-keeper had given it to him, and treating us with a share would beg us not to tell our parents. The very idea of shopwallahs and restaurant-keepers taking such a fancy to Davy, alone, of all boys in Madras was enough to rouse our suspicions, and these suspicions were confirmed by the messages with which we were charged by former neighbours whom we casually met on the road or called on, to report to our parents that Davy had taken various small loans from them, saying that father or mother wanted them urgently, but he had not returned the money. Father or mother going in for loans and deputing Davy to represent them was on the face of it highly incredible, but we knew that if he received cookies and comfits and sherbets as presents, he must be returning the compliments to some

extent by presenting his 'friends' with the borrowed money. Often as we passed in front of a cool drink or sweetmeat shop we were stopped by the proprietor, who discussed with us Davy's unpaid bills and bade us go and tell father to pay up the accounts. Davy, either threatened to kill himself, or to leave us for ever, which threats, we youngsters fearing he would verily carry out if we reported against him, had the effect of turning us his accomplices by hushing up the matter. Davy further knew how to pose as a martyr, lamenting the treachery of friends, who had used his good name in order to obtain credit for themselves, or denouncing a particular shopman, as foisting the whole case on him, on account of private grudge. His wit, ever astonishingly resourceful in concocting stories for his own extenuation, had always a ready and plausible reason to show why certain individuals bore him malice. We did not believe these stories, but shielded him all the same, especially as we had no proof whereby to convict him, and Davy solely based his guilt on proofs.

Before my sisters were sent to the boarding school, they attended Bishop Corrie's school for a short time. Sophie and her younger sister were admitted into the same class, but Mary soon went ahead of the other. Emmie the first born was the pantry thief. Nothing was safe from her depredations in the cupboard. Of course, we all hung about the kitchen, especially when there was going to be something extra nice for

the table, like mutton chops, or fried fish or shrimps, to beg for samples. Emmie always stole from the dishes whatever she liked and ate it on the sly, flying with rage at any of her sisters or brothers who surprised her in this act, Davy taking the chief role of spy. Whenever she came home for the holidays, she would help mother in the kitchen and while she stirred the contents of a dish over the fire, she took out some bits and dropped them into a cool pan or lid and afterwards popped them into her mouth, still steaming hot.

At meal times there was usually a squabble. Father, who wanted to do everything in European style, had a table and chair for himself, the table being too small and the chairs too few for us all. For the rest of us, who sat on the floor, there were low stools and one small dinner mat, the bone of contention. There was a mad scramble to secure that mat, not for any special virtue attached to it, so much as for the excitement involved in possessing the only one of its kind. We certainly had our code of honour, according to which the one who took precedence in announcing the claim for it, of any day, could use that seat for meals on that day. But every one screamed the first thing in the morning: "I want the mat today," and who was to judge who announced it first? This always resulted in a general scramble and scuffle at meal time, but Davy managed to appropriate it whenever he chose, because he could bully the others and enjoy witnessing their distress. Often he would hide away the mat, even when another's claim was firmly

established and produce it at meal time for his own use, callously observing that the claimant *de facto* and not the claimant *de jure* had a better right for it. Thus adding insult to injury, he would make a series of grimaces at the disappointed claimant. It was impossible for father or mother to settle the dispute without knowing who was at fault, and when there were so many different versions and so many denials, they either left us to settle it by ourselves or punished the complainant for bringing reports. Davy had never any scruple to get another punished for his fault. He was not only a consummate liar, and all liars are cowards, but was also such a clever inventor of tales as to make circumstances appear quite black against his victim. In this affair of the dinner mat, things could have been easier if we all had got it by rotation instead of basing our right on the first announcement, but since Davy's bullying would meet with some check, in that event, he ruled it out and declared the other method to be the one and only right one. We likewise fought for the bakery trade-mark that stood like a biscuit on the top of the roll.

We had other troubles, too, at meal-time. The acquisition of wealth in my father's family was the result of years and years of the strictest economy, and the genius that could turn to account every chance and opportunity to add something to the income or savings. My father having been one of the older children, had gone through this Spartan discipline, able to manage

with the minimum possible, even in matters of food. He continued heartlessly rigid in his economy, banning every superfluity, even when, as I believe, he could have afforded to give us some luxury ; for apart from his salary and the handsome presents received from the Rajah, he had another source of income from his private tuitions. Fancy the extent of his parsimony when he paid a rather high milk account owing to Willie and Sophie, all the while grumbling at the expensiveness of everything in Madras and wishing he had been at home where they had a little dairy, for commercial purposes no doubt, but which could give free supplies to the family.

In the morning we took some steamed or baked preparations of rice meal made by mother. At nine, we ate rice with buttermilk or molugutanny and masal vadai or pickle, and at one o'clock, had our heavy meal of rice and sambar and a curry. In the evenings, we had plain coffee or tea, but poor mother had some boiled gram or some pudding made of parched rice or something to give us. For dinner, we always had fish or prawn as we had mutton for breakfast. Now and then for a change we had omelette or egg stew but father relished nothing but fish or flesh. In his family, all ate beef and pork which was another outrage my mother was subjected to, since she being a caste girl had been taught to abhor this diet, but after fathers' separation from his family, for his own reasons he gave up the flesh^t of cow and swine. For

festivals, or whenever sisters came, we had chicken or duck.

And what a table for the Unseen Guest indeed ! You shall know why. We all protested that the curry was not enough, Davy being the loudest. We did not care for the pepper water offered and got wild with poor mother without thinking what her own privations in the matter were. If Davy got a fit, he would sometimes dash his plate against the wall and walk out. Of course, father did not know this. We had our dinner early before his return from tuitions. In the quantity of meat we purchased for the whole family, there used to be only one marrow bone, for which we fought like dogs. My mother would often give it to Willie alone, or to each one of us by turns. When anything upset the order, that was the signal for the outbreak of hostilities.

"Hush, hush, what will the neighbours think ?" mother would say and add: "With the beggarly allowance your miserable father gives me for the household expenses, I cannot provide sumptuous food to a large family, unless I walk the streets and make my lovers pay."

We were wicked enough and father was heartless enough, but oh, the abominable and vulgar remarks my mother used to pass, I shudder to think of them even now. Could a woman debase herself to such an extent as to utter them, however hard she might have been tried ? What the neighbours might think of the squabbles of ill-bred children troubled her more

than what God was thinking of her own filthy words, and the influence of her reckless character on the youngsters. She wanted to make us good by her scoldings. She had many grievances, not the least being my father's single-track mind, which recognised no rights but his own, no freedom but his own in his own household. There are women, to whom adversity teaches long suffering patience, who bear domestic tyranny and cruelty with great fortitude and strength for the sake of the children and the peace of the house; and there are women, too, who are bent on reprisals, and to whom neither domestic peace nor the children's welfare is of any consideration. My mother belonged to the latter class. Her one eternal argument was: "Why should I alone be expected to exercise patience? I am not obliged to put up with all your father's cruelties. I am not going to be a goody goody sort; not I." She kept her word and destroyed her home. When a woman keeps asking: "Why should I alone exercise self-control?" though she sees the home going to pieces, and her children exposed to the world's calumny, then by what sacred name or holy ideal can anybody make an appeal to stay her from her destructive course?

Till the avalanche burst on his head, my father was unforgiving, and yet he would repeat without any compunction, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." Both he and mother used to tell Gospel stories, father to his private pupils and mother to her cronies, and when the Salvationists who

came street preaching with their kirtan singing and met my parents, how grandly they would say, that they also were preaching Christ to the 'heathen', and were sending the children regularly to 'Sunday School'!

Davy and Harry and I went to Sunday School at Anderson's Hall—I believe—attached to the Christian College. What I remember of those occasions, is, the boys gathering blue bells and four o'clocks from the Fenn Hostel garden if the gate was open, and my playing Punch Me and Pinch Me with the other girls before the classes started. We chased one another wildly, in and out of the doors of the hall, in order to pinch the one who answered the story-teller's question as to who the survivor was, after Punch Me, one of the two sisters, had died. If the fugitive was caught we pinched her in right earnest. When I heard the story for the first time, I innocently answered that Pinch Me remained after Punch Me's death, and had a very nasty experience.

There was another of those periodic outbreaks of cholera which persists in my memory. By what special providence our house was untouched by Death stalking abroad, I cannot say. Elsewhere the people died like flies. I remember one night the awful sounds of vomiting by a patient in one of the houses in the line where Kullamma lived and by morning he was gone. Mr. Brown in the opposite row caught the disease one evening and had passed away by dawn. From one of our windows we could see the body dressed in complete white, lying ready for the

funeral. My mother and Emmie cried very much, especially when they saw Mrs. Brown follow the coffin as far as the steps disconsolately weeping as she said : " Good-bye Charlie ; Good-bye Charlie." Having no children of their own, Mr. and Mrs. Brown were fond of other people's children and we used to go often to their house to play. In another house an only child had been carried off. He was a lovely cherub of a boy such as we see in pictures. His father's sister, Miss Emma D'Sylva, a medical student, was aunt Krupa's friend and I had gone to their house with aunty once or twice and had adored the darling baby. Mother accompanied aunt Krupa to see the body but did not take any of the children with her. I only saw the hearse and the little white coffin that was placed in it afterwards. More heart-rending was the tragedy that took place in another house, where one child died in the evening and another the next morning. Brother and sister were buried in the same grave. Fearful days ; Yousuff and his prayer party went their usual nightly rounds singing and marking the houses of friends for the pass over.

About this time occurred a nerve-shattering event. The Periyanaayagams and we continued to be in touch. His Sahib was a bachelor shortly expecting to be married. He was of a fiery temper and belonged to the then numerous class of bureaucrats to whom Indians are only a species of cattle. Something had gone wrong with the lard used for frying and the master

developed a sore throat. He accused Periyamayagam of having used some cheap bazaar ghee or oil and when the butler protested went for him like a mad bull and sent him sprawling to the ground with a kick from his heavy booted foot and did not cease the assault till to his horror he found that life was extinct.

What this sudden and cruel death meant to the family I cannot say, but father and mother could not bear to touch their food after hearing this ghastly news, and mother sobbed at the recollection of it for several days.

On account of Azeeza Bu's father's transfer, our Muslim friends had vacated the next house sometime by now, and it was occupied by a middle-aged single gentleman, European or Eurasian. He had a red face and hands and merry twinkling eyes. Bachelor or widower, he was both popular and troublesome. We must have proved a great nuisance to Mr. Jenkyns by constantly taking peeps at him through the window accessible to us and taking to our heels if he turned his eyes on us. Almost the first change he effected was to put a curtain to this window. All the same, he would often call us and give us lozenges and peppermints, which none but Davy would dare to take from his hand. The first occasion on which Davy had received the present, he simply grabbed at it and rushed boisterously indoors to exhibit the prize. "Did you say, 'thanks,' boy?" asked my father. Davy's face fell, but he ran back to say it. "Thank you, sir," came Davy's voice at the window and from

the room came the reply: "No, it is finished." Mr. Jenkyns probably thought that the greedy boy had come back to ask for more. The trouble we had from him was in this way. He frequently locked up his rooms and went out without turning the tap off, so that when the water came, our tap only hissed, while it was an outrage to hear the splash of water in his house seeking the gutter. At such times Davy would turn cat-burglar, jump over the wall, close the running tap and come back. Then ours would start running.

CHAPTER VIII

CLEARER IMPRESSION

RECOLLECTIONS come crowding on me now. I must have been seven years' old, and how slim I must have been! The window that faced the room, where Mr. Brown's body lay in state, had lost one of its bars. Thenceforward, Harry and I ceased using the front doorway for going in and out, and made our exits and entries, solely, through this gap, of course holding the nearest bars, far apart to make the gap wider. Davy, who probably had pulled off the missing bar, was the first to teach us the new use to which the window could be put. The spirit of adventure, leading us to a reckless use of the passage, we received the thrashing we deserved: when caught red-handed.

By this time I was getting quite vain of my alleged good looks, and as for selfishness, I was growing the inhuman monster that I was till the other day. The thought of my denying to my own sisters and brothers what I had and they had not sometimes under circumstances, when they were helpless, is killing me to-day, especially, as I can never make up to some, as they are no more. There is no anguish like the thought of

this. If it had been a thing of childhood's passing days, that would have been different, but my selfishness grew more and more abominable with my increasing years. People have thought me less unkind than I have really been, judging from my looks, and unable to see the hideous feelings in my heart.

I cannot say why I grew so abnormally selfish, but there were many factors which, instead of checking or discouraging this criminal nature, tended to encourage and harden it, till nothing short of a cataclysm could shake it. At home, I was the pet and show piece. My father preferred my company to that of any other child's when he went out for walks or gave calls. Aunt Krupa loved to dress me well and exhibit me to her friends. Everybody who took any particular notice of me, would remark : "Enna alagana pullai," (what a pretty child) ! The neighbours and friends used to smile their admiration for me and some cronies cracked their fingers on their own cheeks in token of their fondling me. On one occasion a hawker was advertising the merits of his goods, when my mother was making some purchases for Willie's baptism ; he produced some flowered imitation silk in yellow and when my mother doubted the colour suiting me, he insisted on her buying the very stuff, "Ayyo, idhu dhan edukuno. Ithay pota parundu pora kili yatom irukumay." (This is just the colour for her. She will look a parrot in flight if she wears that). I had not yet become disgustingly familiar with the shameless

flatteries of hawkers, and believed every word of what he said; and begged my mother to take that, despite the fact that yellow was a colour I detested. I had also often heard the remark, that I was quite out of place in the family, and expressions of wonder as to how I came to be born in such a contrast to the other members. In my own eyes then, I was the fairest and loveliest being on earth, and when my ideas were now and then rudely and mercilessly shocked by my coming into contact with fair and beautiful girls, before whom nobody would think of paying a compliment to me, my heart used to sink within me, as I turned green with envy and felt tortured with jealousy. But it was not quite frequently and in large numbers that I met such lovely girls in South India, my home. Even as it was, there were numbers of beautiful young girls with whom I came in daily contact, but they were either so illiterate or so orthodox that they and their parents did not think it a disadvantage to disfigure them in the way of dressing their hair and the use of clumsy jewels and inelegant dresses.

I never saw the ladies of my mother's family, but on my father's side they were remarkably plain looking, and no wonder, I became a bundle of vanity, and the looking-glass became my favourite toy. Every now and then, I would gaze at my own reflection, not from a suitable distance either, but like one suffering from acute myopia. The whole day long I would be powdering my face for the effect of a make up, spill

the powder, and get into disgrace with my sisters. My mother was an incontrovertible native, who hated powders and Western paints, but clung to the modes and customs of her foremothers, none of which she would change, not even to please my father for the peace of the house. I have described her home costume already, a saree without a petticoat, which in those days were equally abhorred by Hindus and caste Christians, and she wore a bust bodice, having, I think, only one jacket, a velvet one for outing. She painted her skin with saffron paste and stained her finger and toe nails with henna and traced the outlines of her eyelids with kohl, which she kept in a tiny casket hanging to a nail in the wall. My vanity made me steal, this black ointment, to finish my make up, with the result, that both with my want of skill, and forgetfully rubbing my eyes, the kohl spread in large patches all over my face, giving me the appearance of a hobgoblin.

My passion for the looking-glass often led me to a fairy-land of imagination. Quite late in life, happening to read, "Alice Through The Looking Glass," in the working of Alice's mind, as she sat by the fireside, her knitting in her hands, her eyes glancing at the reflection of the things in her own room, I seemed to have lived my own childhood over again. Did I not picture to myself a magic land of beauty through the mirror and did not even the drab commonplace things appear transformed in the glass? How often have I held the mirror horizontally in my

hands and begun pacing the floor, unconsciously working myself into the belief that the ceiling which I saw in the glass actually lay at my feet, my heart jumping into my mouth when I came to the ridge of the roof and felt that I was going to fall!

I do not remember having seen Emmie in frocks at all, and even Sophie would have gone in for sarees long ago but for her stunted size., which made Mary look older than her. I remember these two sisters wearing frocks. But the outlook of all were essentially eastern, for in spite of their dress all loved saffron, henna, Kohl and jewellery, and it was a thrilling time for us when we had bendees (ladies' fingers) for a dish, for we could gather the tops thrown away and stick them to our feet and faces like ornaments. The bunches of onion flowers, looking somewhat like white candytuft, we would suspend from our ear-rings and pretend they were junkies-tasselled gold pendants, dangling from the ears. My sisters and their friends were fond of walking on half cocoanut shells, one under each foot with the curved surface up. A hole was bored at the top and a string passed through with a small chip or pebble at the end to keep the string from coming out. The strings were then held like reins in the hand, and the girls stood on the shells and walked in imitation of boys walking on stilts, and did there errands on the road with this strange means of perambulation. We made finger rings also with cocoanut shells, first by wearing out a hole in a small bit and then by rubbing

off the edges on a stone till a small circlet was formed.

We had a number of dolls and toys, mostly presents from our uncles and aunts, and oh, how welcome their visits were, not only because of the baubles and playthings they brought for us, and our gloomy home was all the brighter for their coming, but also for the prospects of small cash presents that we received at their departure. Uncle Purushotham was the most popular in that he blew soap bubbles, took us to the beach, and joined us at our games, besides smoking cigarettes on the sly, asking us to keep the coast clear. Aunt Kezia came for a few days and brought us lots of home-made sweets, kalkals, fried sweet puffs and other nice things. I felt one of my first pangs of grief at parting, for her departure, and the whole of that day I could not eat or play as usual, but spent my time going about the house sadly, collecting a wisp of hair that had fallen from her comb, the match with which she had lit a lamp, and such curious mementoes to cherish the memory of her visit in spite of the fact that she had rather disappointed us by not giving even a quarter anna to each, when she left. Davy always thinking of his sole self, gave a free vent to his chagrin and enacted a farce, entertaining us all with the grossest exaggeration of aunt Kezia's appearance, her ways, and her words, while all the time that she was with us, he was very polite and officious in his own behaviour. My mother had given us to understand that nothing could be expected

from this aunt by way of money, as we were discussing the amount of our savings in the undi box and counting chickens before they were hatched, by speculating on the additions from aunty's contribution. She would part with anything rather than with money, and we found that it was so. She pleaded in vain all the time she was in Madras, that my parents would give me away to her in adoption and went away disappointed.

There was a curious incident also connected with her visit. Aunt with some of her nieces and nephews slept in the hall, where the few pieces of furniture were pushed to the wall and mats spread on the floor, converting it into a bed-room at nights. Once, in the middle of the night, there suddenly broke out piercing screams and yells from one and all of us, frightening the neighbours out of their sleep. Father rushed into the hall, with the castor oil night lamp in one hand, and a stick in the other, to see what was the matter. All was a hush soon, except a noise like splashing of dropping water in the court yard. Aunt Kezia trembling all over, and covered with cold drops of perspiration asked faltering : "What is that?" "That's the tap running," answered her brother, shaking with laughter. "Some one must have forgotten to turn off the cock when the tap was empty; now the water is coming and flowing down." We were all quite familiar with these tricks of water-taps, but aunt Kezia, born and bred at Sunderkote, where there is no tap system, had imagined all sorts

of horrid things; Mr. Jenkyns from the next house tapped at our door asking to know what was wrong, and it took father all that he was worth to state the truth, though he spared aunty by attributing the fright to the children alone, whereas it was she who first started yelling and screamed into my right ear, so that I howled next, and the rest took up the dismal chorus.

Among our playthings, I had a tin crocodile, that was meant to propel itself, when the rubber strip under its belly was twisted or stretched. But even before the crocodile came to my hands, Davy had destroyed the rubber attachment, so that I had to pass a string through its nose and drag it about. Davy himself had a mechanical locomotive with four carriages, and Harry a cart fixed with a drum which sounded when the vehicle moved. With this we sometimes set up such a rush of traffic, that with its noise, if not accidents, it threatened to destroy everybody's nerves; for I dragged my crocodile round and round the hall, Harry came with his drum cart, Davy with an engine which had lost its gear, and Sybil and others with their toys, all drawn with strings, and what with our shouts, laughter and quarrels, it would have taxed even the brains of a Hore Belisha to reduce the traffic to a noiseless system.

Mary had a beautiful doll which would close its eyes when put to bed, and another which would never go to bed at all, as it would sit bolt upright, the moment you left off pressing the head down. Sophie and Mary had tin and

china cooking and tea sets, and Willie had **not** only plenty of bright coloured wooden toys, but also a spring snake which would wriggle out of a tube staring with its beady eyes. We had flutes, whistles and trumpets, a jack-in-the-box and other toys. What we chiefly wanted was pocket money to buy and eat nice things, now and then, but not often. I was fond of candy, boiled ground-nut and yams. Sophie preferred spiced things, like ompudi, masal vadai and the like. Mary and Emmie had the sweet tooth. Willie loved peppermints, sugar-cane and Huntley Palmers' gem biscuits, the other boys being specially fond of everything. Willie insisted on every seller of sweetmeats and bakery things being called and something bought for him, and there was one particular rogue, who discreetly chose our pial to set his tray down and to re-arrange the things, while all the while lustily announcing his goods, knowing that the baby would turn the house upside down if we sent away the man without purchasing his wares. Repeated warnings failing to take effect; my father one day charged for the basket, to kick it into the gutter, when the man saved his goods in time and took to his heels abusing father as he liked.

Davy's favourite feast when he had pocket money was red or white badam (almond) halva, or dood peda—something made of cream—with red sherbet on the surface of which floated subja seeds, looking in their damp condition like so many microscopic jelly-fish. Apart from decent

hotels and restaurants, where customers, if they were caste people, were served in rooms, there was a refreshment stall in almost every street and lane, standing on pials and all kinds of odd places. In India, there are hotels for vegetarians and hotels for non-vegetarians, hotels for every caste and for people speaking every tongue, and Madras had a representation of all. In many cases where low caste people sold dosais and iddallies and other confections, all kinds of flesh and fish curry could be got for payment. I have seen people buying dosais, ordering even for chicken and duck's flesh curry to eat the cake with, the variety and costliness of the messes depending on the status of the landlord or landlady keeping the stall. Davy had account at many cheap restaurants, where he bought and ate what he liked for occasional payments and mostly for credit, changing his patronage from one to another, according to his debts, when he was anxious to dodge this creditor or the other.

The rain usually damped our spirits; for when it was wet everywhere movements and activities had to be greatly restricted. We tried to get as much fun out of this gloom as possible. We would catch in our tumblers the rain water that poured down from the corners of the eaves, and drink it without being thirsty, or watch the pretty shapes of the drops as they splashed up from the flooded court yard. The gutters were full and ran fiercely, while Black Town streets were muddy rivers, flowing between lines of houses. In those days there were

occasional accidents, of children being drowned in gutters, and even adults being swept off to the sea. But to us, the floods provided no end of excitement. It was fun to launch paper boats and other floatable things on the waters, Willie taking a great pleasure in chucking his wooden toys into the stream. We watched people rushing to the nearest pial for shelter, when caught in a sudden shower. Other unfortunate pedestrians with their umbrellas open and nether garments gathered up, as much as possible to save them from a wetting, and cooly men and women, protecting themselves with a palm leaf umbrella or hooded capes of mat made a picturesque sight as they waded along through the flood three feet deep. Women and girls who could not expose too much of their limbs in order to retrieve a dress, were followed by a trailing saree end or skirt behind buoyed up by the water. The gloom was relieved in a different way too ; for then mother would come with some boiled beans or fried gram and distribute large handfulls, which we enjoyed eating. Somehow anything that mother gave seemed to be nice.

If the rainy weather was not quite unpleasant, there was nothing to beat the disgust with which we endured the whitewashing of the house or renewal of the tiles. Everywhere it was confusion and chaos, all hands were requisitioned to shift the things from place to place and we had no comfortable nook to stay, and no food in time. Heaps of dust fell from the roof making a thick bed on the floor, and now and then

scorpions also dropped and bats flew out. At the sight of a bat, Davy would advise us all to clap our palms to our ears, and he spoke in English for fear that the creatures would understand Tamil. There is a belief that when disturbed, the bats make straight for your ears, and seize them, and do not loosen their hold till seven different donkeys had brayed from the time of the event. Davy would then chase the bats, flinging at them as if they could understand and be stung to the quick, a doggerel rhyme in Tamil: "Vavval vootuku ponā. nau thongu, nee thongu." (If we call on Mr. Bat, you must hang and I must hang like him).

Once Sophie had an attack of typhoid. She was sick for a long time hovering between life and death. There was much nursing and anxiety, and the doctor was a frequent visitor. We felt quite glad on the occasions of his call as if the governor himself had paid us a visit and would proudly tell our friends that the 'dresser' had been to our house, expecting them to envy our luck. Willie could not tolerate folks making much of the patient and tried to divert some of the sympathy and sadness to himself, pretending to be seriously ailing. He would collapse into the easy chair or spread a mat for himself and lie down, groaning and insisting on people nursing him also. Sometimes he would sham to be too ill and weak to talk, getting wild, if we laughed at all his stage airs. Sophie was undergoing a crisis, and we were all strictly forbidden to talk but in whispers or to go to her room. She was little

more than a skeleton, and had gone quite deaf. One evening, forgetting the orders about Sophie's room, I ran headlong into it for some purpose which I do not remember now, and tripping over her bed clothes tumbled and fell upon her. As I picked myself up I was seized with a horror that I had killed my sister. As I stood staring at her, trembling in every limb, she opened her large eyes and turned them on me. Then I said some of the most foolish things I have ever said. "Chinnakka (junior elder sister) are you dead?" She was too feeble even to smile at such an absurd question, granting that she had heard and understood my words.

In those days, I was mortally afraid to die, and would have anybody die but me. Often, I suffered from a morbid mind, the first occasion being when our milkman was dying of neglected gangrene. He always used to be funny. If a few drops of the milk fell on the floor, as he measured out our supply, he would, like all Hindu milk sellers, reverently wipe it off with his hand, as it was considered a sacrilege for milk to be trodden under foot. Since we had to talk in English with father, our knowledge of the language, which every butler or ayah can speak in their own way, was some extraordinary achievement in his own eyes. He would not go away as soon as he finished giving our supply, but squat on his heels, call for us and ask us to give the English equivalent for whatever thing he named. The results staggered him with an exaggerated idea of our learning. When Kandaswamy stepped on a sharp stone

which went into his foot and set up a festering wound, in spite of the barber's surgery, no amount of persuasion from us would make him go to the hospital. By and by, he was unable to go about his business, but managed to visit us all the same once in a way. When it was too late, he had been to a hospital, where he was told that there was no hope for him. I saw the man's anguish in despair, and my own mind was affected. I could not eat or sleep or play. More than once in my life, I was in dread of death. I laugh at myself for it now. Though afraid to die, nevertheless, I longed to be sick for the sake of being pitied, but none had so robust a constitution as I. If this seeking to be sick was unnatural, Davy showed himself to be more unnatural still. Once he actually prayed that father might die, when the latter was ill; for father was the only person he feared and could not disobey. He would tell his playfellows: "Amma, nalla avungo dhan. Appa mathiram rombo ketta avungo," (Mother is good, but father is a very bad man.) just because the father was strict and punished him for his incorrigible lies and mischief. There was not the least idea at that age where the daily bread was to come from if father died. I remember the time when plaguing mother for pocket money, if she said she had none to spare, I would remind her of the change she had in her purse for the domestic expenses. I also wanted food to be given to every beggar who came to the door, and in Madras the name of beggars was Legion, and

if mother said, there was no rice, I would answer in front of the petitioner: "Oh yes, there is rice in the cooking pot," but I would never make a personal sacrifice, no matter who went hungry.

At one time in our history, we had a self-invited guest at table frequently. She was a light complexioned white haired old woman, with many teeth gone and the few remaining ones, yellow and sticking out loose. Davy would imitate the way she used to speak, with so many gaps in her teeth. She was a distant relative on my mother's side and proved herself such a nuisance that father, grumbling at having to feed her at frequent intervals, would order mother to give the guest a broad hint. Mother would be wild at such times and retort: "You are the master of the house. If you do not want to entertain guests, then it is your business to tell them to clear out. Why do you make me do all the unpleasant things?" On this occasion, father justified himself with a show of reason saying: "She is a woman, Dhanam, and a man cannot speak so plainly to her. You have got to do it yourself."

This old lady Muthyalamma used to entertain us all with interesting accounts of South America. Everything she saw here reminded her of that Paradise, since there was not an object which did not furnish her with a chance of discussing her favourite theme. The fried karuvadu she ate with sambar or pepper-water in our house was a poor specimen before the huge pieces of

salted fish they had in South America. One in India can never have an idea of the thickness of the sugar-cane nor the sweetness of the juice of the cane over there. There was no end or limit to the romantic anecdotes she had to give about that fairy-land of hers. Emmie used to boast and tell her school friends that she had a great aunt, who had been round half the globe and made America her home for several years. Father used to check her in private and say: "No more of that child. Your great aunt did not visit foreign places as a tourist. She was enticed from her home by the recruiting agents, who sent out their victims abroad for indentured labour, and neither their relatives nor friends knew what became of them." She was not even a blood relative, for she claimed kinship only through my step-grandmother.

Her conversations were interesting, and now I wish I had been older than what I was, so that I might have obtained all the information, which would interest me at present. In those days I had my own doubts and desires which I could not express in words. What was more, I was so excessively shy that I never so much as opened my mouth before strangers. The poor old lady had a son, Mr. Kanniah, a clerk somewhere, and he used to be quite put out at the way his mother would abscond from his own house from time to time and invite herself at other people's. Whenever he missed her suddenly, he knew where to look for her, and if he happened to find her here, he would take her protesting.

self, back, scolding his mother all the while for her meanness as if he had neglected to take care of her. At such times as courtesy demanded it, my father would take her part and pacify Mr. Kanniah, asking him to overlook the eccentricities of old age. Muthyalamma herself had no end of complaints against her daughter-in-law.

Once my mother's step-brother came to us on a visit. We just loved to have relatives coming, and this uncle was so fair and handsome that we were all quite in love with him. He was a smoker too, and in those days smoking being regarded somewhat vicious even in men, he would also take his puffs on the sly, striking the match on his coat or breeches. Once I took a puff from his cigarette, and the giddiness and nausea I felt, poignantly recalled to my memory the result of my chewing a bit of tobacco from Arokiamma's bag. This uncle's home was more than five hundred miles away from the sea. He therefore, went to the beach almost the first thing after his arrival and returned home with a collection of marine specimens, large lobsters and crabs of bright colours, cuttle-fish and shells and a bottle of brine. Davy, always meddlesome, inquisitive and mischievous, spilt the sea-water during a secret inspection of my uncle's trophies and his fertile brain suggesting a ready substitute, he refilled the bottle with a thick solution of kitchen salt. Poor uncle carried it home as piously as a pilgrim from Benares brings Ganges water. Fish and prawns were a rare luxury to those living out of the reach of the sea, and

so we always feasted our relatives who came from the interior parts on the products of the sea. Mother had bought some fleshy lobsters, huge big fellows for uncle, cooked the bodies in dripping and made a sauce with the heads and brinjals among other curries. At the time of serving, mother missed one body in the gravy, and not doubting who the thief could be, questioned Davy straightway, as if there was any use in that. Davy not only denied any knowledge of it with pious horror, but was quite positive that mother had bought only nine and not ten, as he himself had counted them before they were boiled and shelled. The suggestion had begun to operate on mother, who had an inclination to doubt her own senses. When, however, she went to examine the heads in the sauce, there were ten heads for nine bodies.

Like the boy in the story of the wolf, who raised an alarm for the fun of it when there was no wolf, Davy was not believed even when he spoke the truth. He was once sent to the sweetmeat bazaar by some aunt or uncle to get two packets of cashew nuts fried in ghee with salt and pepper coating and seasoning leaf. He returned home pale and empty handed. We were sitting on the roof of some house where we happened to be residing just then. He told us that a crow had knocked off both from his hands and gone. He was being subjected to a severe cross-examination, as to how it happened and where, and why he did not hold the packets tighter, when some cashew nuts dropping at our

feet, we looked up and saw a crow flying overhead with one of the potlams (packets) in question. Davy's innocence was established, and thenceforward this incident was quoted in support of all his falsehoods.

We were all very cruel in childhood, but Davy was the worst of the lot. Cats used to make their beds in the cold ashes of the hearth after the fire was put out, and steal everything that was fit for their consumption. I used to pour boiling hot water on them and chased them shouting: "Pussy cat, Pussy cat where had you been," and truly I discovered that a cat had at least nine lives, if not more; for they appeared none the worse for all the severe scalding they got. Often we got into certain moods, when a particular occupation seemed to be the one and only thing in the world for us. Although at other times we were begged to disinfect the beds of bugs and we never cared, when the mood was on us however, Davy, giving the lead, we hunted the vermin out of bedclothes, furniture, crevices and holes in walls, and cracks in windows and doors, digging them out with match sticks and broomsticks, that reeked with blood and stank hideously. Davy would catch some alive and roast them over a large live coal, just to see them swell and burst, or he would place one on the table and cut into two with a pocket knife and gloat over its agonies. Sophie who had given up her studies long ago on account of poor health, would cry and faint away at such unnatural sights. Her nerves were highly excitable, and she

used to feel a torture, if somebody scratched the walls with finger nails, or wrote on the slate with a creaking pencil, which we wantonly did in order to tease the poor creature.

There was once a violent quarrel between Mrs. Daniel and another Eurasian woman, over what issue I do not know, but I remember, how for want of adequate knowledge in English to express their opinions and feelings forcibly, the two women practised their eloquence in Tamil, whenever they were handicapped in spite of their pretension not to know the language in every day life. Though the words that flew like showers of sharp arrows between the two combatants, are impossible to be set down here to give an idea of what the charges were like, I select some choice specimens of the insults they flung at each other. There was a confusion of "You are a Parachi, a bandycoot in a gown;" "You are a Chucklichchee; who was your grandfather?" "Chee, shut your mouth, todapa kattai" (Bundle of broomsticks). "You, po from my house, you widow of a denkey, or I will slipper you." "Show me your slipper, you pitchay karchi (beggar). If you had a slipper for your foot, you would have some conjee for your belly." "Chee, vayai moodu," (fie, shut up). "You vayai moodu, Sirki, jooth leko martyum," (I will beat you with the shoe). "No shame to come to my house and quarrel. Get out of here." "No conjee to drink, but you can talk big, you bajaari (virago). Who came to your house? I am standing on the public road. I won't move from here, you black

Nigger." "I am not an ayah's daughter born in shame to a dorai," "My father was not a butler's son who wore a hat and married a missy."

Where the quarrel might have ended, is difficult to say, for Mrs. Smith came with reinforcements to strengthen her sister's position, but for the sudden appearance of Mr. Daniel in his faded and frayed out khaki suit, his evening cap and rotten shoes. He gave one push to his screaming wife, not very rudely, took her into the house and bolted the doors, and though we could still hear her screams and protests and curses, the war came to an end.

"Sunday anniki sonday potu
Monday anniki, monday vodikino,"
(Quarrel on a Sunday
Break your heads on a Monday)

This was the pious funeral oration pronounced by Davy over the remains of the quarrel.

At nights jackals used to visit the little maidan, where stood a few scattered korukapulies which dropped their circular ripe pods on the muck heaps below for the children to gather. Their howls at nights were dismal. As I had never seen a jackal except in pictures, one night, I took a light to the window, and tried to catch a glimpse of one. Emmie, who was at home told me, that the light would show me to the Jackal and not the Jackal to me, whereupon, out of sheer fright, I withdrew my head from the window and gave up trying to spot the animal.

In those days, I had the most absurd notion of kings, not only wearing crowns and

sitting on thrones as if they permanently posed for a photograph, but that what they ate was all gold, gold undergoing every process of digestion and elimination in the system. My idea about a telegram was just as weird; for I imagined that the message in its cover came gliding along the telegraph wires. But what were the white cups on the poles? Often wrecked kites entangled in the wires, would flap their brilliantly coloured strips on the breeze, and perhaps, some of the telegraphic messages shared the same fate. My notions about making a fortune were just as ridiculous. Whenever I accompanied Thayee, on her marketing expeditions, I used to see a pavement stall kept by a half blind old woman, selling dolls' trinkets which were made of lead and covered with gold or silver paper or coloured tin-foil. My idea was that the trinkets were real gold and silver jewels, being sold for such a trifle, because the old witch was blind and did not recognise precious metal. I used to entertain day dreams and Alnaskar visions, as to how to save enough money to buy up the whole stall and make a fortune.

CHAPTER IX

MADRAS STREET SIGHTS AND SOUNDS

MY earliest recollection of vehicular traffic misses the cycle; the motor car of course is out of the question. The whole day long there was the rumbling of wheels of the various kinds of vehicles, going to and fro, the slow moving corporation carts, or kuppai vandi as they were called, the double bullock open top waggons, sometimes drawn by men instead of beasts, the push push, the ricksha, the bullock bandy and jutka, and coaches and phaetons. The two latter, when owned by private people, were grand affairs, with beautiful painting and rubber wheels, footmen in picturesque liveries running before flourishing the white yak's tail, and footmen standing in the dickey behind. The children in the streets and even grown-up illiterates made it a point to salaam to the occupants of these grand equipages, whoever they might be, as they salaamed almost to any topeewallah, black or white. Though he did not have footmen running before or standing behind, Gulam Rassool Khan rode in a coach, and whenever he passed our house, I used to drop him a courtesy. Early in the morning, syces used to take out horses for exercise, the noble animals having wraps of gay coloured checks for their

backs. Also in the cool of the mornings and evenings, the streets would be lively with prams, in which European and Eurasian babies made their tour of the road in the charge of their ayahs or of mammas and elder sisters, if they were too poor to keep an ayah. There were some too poor, even to give their babies a pram and therefore walked up and down with the little ones in their arms.

I think, Madras beggars occupy as prominent a place, in my reminiscences, as Madras traffic. You are often awakened from sleep by the dismal complaints of the beggar, as by the hateful crowings of the rooster. The first doleful, nerve racking cries of "Amma; thayai; konjom pitchay podamma; konjom pitchay podu thayai; kal illay; kai illay;" (Ma'am; mother; give a little charity, mother; my leg is crippled; my hand is crippled; I am blind), are constantly kept up and multiplied, till you hear the time gun in the night. The sick, the maimed, especially those suffering from unthinkable skin troubles, the deaf, the mute, the blind, men, women and children, old and young, they just swarmed everywhere, believing that any who relieved a couple of them could relieve the wants of the multitudes on the tramp. Some sang, some danced, or amused you by other tricks, while some had no right to beg at all, except for the belief that their caste was meant for professional begging. There were fakirs (Muslim beggars) who begged because they were lazy, and others who had a vow to pay at Mecca. These had tambourines for beating rhymes in the intervals between their hauntingly melodious songs,

while they received their alms in bowls of huge half shells of cocoanut. Then came the man with the rattle-drum, alternating a series of quick and sharp rattles with a quicker and louder recitation of lists of fortune for you even before setting his eyes on you. One middle aged blind man in a ragged dirty loin cloth used to sing a merry song dolefully, beating a musical tattoo with his overgrown finger nails on the tin-mug, in which he collected his alms to transfer them later to a bag improvised for the purpose from his ragged dirty scarf. It was an English air ending alternately with 'good morning sir', and 'good morning ma'am'. When the beggars held out their bowls for cooked food, we could see a hotchpotch of various kinds of curries and sauces with rice, not of a homogeneous variety or colour, collected from various houses. If Davy was hungry and food was not ready, he would often envy the beggars their non-descript but savoury looking mess and remark: "Won't they just enjoy that?" Sophie always had a poor appetite, but if she saw a beggar, gobbling his dripping rice and curry with a gusto, she would run to mother and ask for food. Beggars could be as insolent as they pleased, when they were turned out, or did not get as much as they expected; for they would swear at us, using all kinds of abusive language. It was impossible even for the most charitably disposed to serve the gangs that kept on arriving at your door-step from morning till night. Others would quarrel violently because your doles were 'beggarly'.

What shall I mention next? Let me take up the sale of a thousand things from dawn to almost midnight. Refreshments for morning coffee, or if you would have me term it, 'chota hazree'. Their name was legion, but I shall mention a few of those I remember. The soft doyle-like morsels, which they called idiapam or samia and the red and white varieties of puttu, rice-flour with cocoanut scrapings steamed in a bamboo mould. There were iddalies and dosais, and a host of other things made of rice meal, including oppers, "olayapam, malida and pudding. The whole day long refreshments of all descriptions were sold in the streets. "Masal vadai, muruk," was one of the street cries, and the tray that the vendor carried on his head, with one hand holding it in position, and the other constantly flourishing a cane, to keep off harassing crows, you would find not only masal vadai and muruk, but also pagodas, which were lumps of dhall paste with condiments cooked in ghee or oil; some preparation with a whole green chillie in the centre embedded in the stuff; long slices of green plantain each fried with its own coating of dhall paste, ompudi, boondhi, split and shelled bengal gram fried with pepper and salt, and many such things made with dhall. The man who cried, "Rhotie, biscothe," had rolls and biscuits, chief of the latter being long suckers for babies, and buns and muffins. The trays of other sweetmeat sellers contained balls of bengal gram, gingelly seeds, ground-nuts, or puffed maize sweetened and kept in shape by hardened jaggery

syrup. Besides these were sweetmeats, black, white, yellow, red and orange and sometimes blue and green also, some made of sugar, the coarser ones of jaggery, and a number of them containing cocoanut, and all of every geometrical shape and model. They sold kadalai payir, mocha kottai payir and other payirs, being different varieties of boiled bean seeds and pulses. You heard several more cries, "kadalai purp, batani"; "vare kadalai", "bombai mittai", "pal mittai", "buddeki bal", "puttu rice balls", both white and black varieties; there were all kinds of toys and fancy things in sugar dangling from strings attached to a pole which the seller carried, crying: "China mittai". There were again toys made of sugar and cream, in colours packed in a box. Again we had hard-bake, and those unctuous things—ladu, jilabi, halva and their set, apart from icecream, sherbet, peppermint lozenges, and what not? I must stop somewhere.

What about the fruits, Indian and English? Oranges, bananas of three or four varieties, strawberries, pomegranates, mangoes, jacks, melons, custard-apples, cashew-nuts, jamoons, jujubes, katmambalam, whose kernel tasted better than walnut, koruka puli,—nungus (palm ice), and the soft sweet spongy kernel of the palmyra seed when it had been in the earth for some time, palmyra bulbs, and here again, it is impossible to name the lots and lots of fruits and edible roots and other things sold. The vegetables, fruit and leaf and bulb—and stem too—were galore. Poultry birds, game birds, eggs passed in the coterie. You

heard, "Adikira vath, roasht vath", and saw a number of ducks dangling in bunches held by their necks on exhibition while the rest were in their baskets. There passed panniers of chickens, the sample ones being carried about with their legs bunched and their heads dangling down. "Koyi muttai," or "vath muttai" sounded, and you knew they were hen's eggs and duck's eggs for sale. Fish and prawns and crabs, dry and fresh went their rounds. Then shrill cries of "Manga pickeel, ma; lime pickeel ma", burst on your ears, and you understood that the women were selling mango and lime pickles. They sold other pickles also made of brinjal, pavaka and other vegetables. Then dry citron and lemon slices or whole fruits pickled only with salt were hawked about. Apart from soda and lemonade, 'dhy-o' (curds), milk, panasar, oils and ghee and flowers like jasmine, roses, crysanthamums, marjoram, dhavanam or lavender leaf, there were clothes and other articles for the dresses of ladies and gentlemen, and fancy goods and toys and trinkets brought to our doors by hawkers and pedlars. Pots and pans and metalware; pieces of furniture, china and other goods, should not be omitted. The knife grinder set up his apparatus on the road-side to sharpen blunt knives and scissors; men who took your copper and brass vessels for tinning the interior, made a furnace somewhere on the road and settled down with their bellows and other apparatus, to do their job. Some men carried about them huge bunches of keys to sell you spare ones or substitutes for a lost key and

men carrying old umbrella ribs offering to repair your umbrellas ; there were those who wanted to repair your boots and shoes and would cry, " Boot repair, ma".

I think I should give a separate place to the bangle seller, for he looms large in my memory. The country-fashioned fellow displayed all his goods hanging in enormous bunches from one shoulder, while on his other he carried the carpet or rug, which was his stall whenever he had a bargain ; for he spread it on the floor of the customer's house to deposit his load. This chap usually wore a dhoti and a large turban with perhaps a scarf. The average bangle seller was a consummate flatterer, since the process of working the bangles up a customer's wrist was fraught with many risks and inconveniences. First of all in those days, it was considered chic only to have tight fitting bangles ; the tighter, the better, and every one went in for it as a pious duty. It was a comparatively easy task, where he had to deal with a soft pulpy hand, but it was far otherwise when he had to negotiate a bony one. To clasp the thin wrist like a ring, the bangle had to work its way up the bones of the palm and often stuck up in the middle. To comfort the suffering customer for the torture she was undergoing, and at the same time to save his own bangles from bursting, the bangle seller had a hard job of it. He used soap lather to make the hand slippery, and soapy words to soothe the nerves of his victim, dilating on the attractiveness his bangles added to the wearer's arms, and you

know, that women are always easily flattered. All the same, he received kicks from some young girls in their struggles to free themselves when the pain was getting too sharp, and the number of smashed bangles proved the costliness of the fashion that demanded tight fitting bangles.

The other sort of bangle seller was something of a gentleman; he wore a mundu, a coat and a neat cap and sold "bombai vallel, potti vallel", (Bombay bangles, box bangles). His wares were not vulgarly exhibited, but they were packed neatly in the box he carried, and along with the bangles we sometimes saw imitation precious stones, diamonds, emeralds and rubies.

The gypsy women, whom they call Korucha women in those parts, had beads of all sizes and colours and needles and drugs to sell. They offered you charms and also to tell your fortune for a trifling payment, or a handful of grains.

There were plenty of street shows and amusements; the snake charmers; dancing bears; performing bulls and monkeys; jugglers, rope-walkers and acrobats, and magicians; there was the crude street movie consisting of a box on a stand, the box having holes, for the eyes fitted with lenses like those of a stereoscope and you were allowed to see the pictures at the rate of two for a pie I believe. Not only did the showman or woman carry the movie box singing all the way, but the song grew more enthusiastic when the apparatus was set down for customers and the panoramic pictures turned with a handle; for it was in lusty songs and rhymes

that the pictures were described and interpreted to the spectator, and not infrequently, what we saw, were not even post-card views or paintings, so much as the advertisement pictures and trade-marks pulled off from millinery goods, and the legend invented for each was simply astounding and reflected credit on the resourcefulness of the manager's brain and the individual's poetical and musical talent. I remember one in particular, a picture of human skeletons, skulls and other bones lying scattered thickly about and the show-woman came out with the song that what we saw were Burmese ghosts and ghouls, but you should have heard the funny rhymes.

From panoramic pictures, it sounds ridiculous to jump to Madras cows, but my whole account is in the nature of the crude and childish movies I have described above, no two pictures necessarily having a connection, since it is not so much a story as series of recollections I am giving you. Who is not familiar with Madras cows and Madras milkmen? The milch cows look like survivals of Pharaoh's lean kine and they really were, or in my imagination, a savage lot from whose horns, children at any rate had better keep at a safe distance. To the drainage pipe of almost every other house, you would find one of these creatures tethered in the early morning and evening, fondly licking the stuffed skin of its once lovely, playful, frisky young calf, slaughtered to save its own share of the mother's milk, to be sold, while the pitiless slayer squats on his heels at the udder and draws the spurting

white liquid fizzling into the pail. After giving you your supply of milk, he flings the stuffed calf across his shoulders and marches the cow to the next place where the operation is to be repeated, on the way selling the milk remaining in the pail to small customers, and not over-anxious either, if the measure be short, since tap water that was easily available was alway handy to make up for any deficiency in quantity. Even big customers who stood guard during the milking had to be exceedingly vigilant, for the slightest unwariness gave the unscrupulous knave an opportunity to adulterate the milk.

It was rather under bovine circumstances that my first remembered view of a real, live Brahmin took place. A middle-aged chap, dark brown and bald but with classic features, and only a knee length loin cloth for his only garment and the sacred thread passing over a shoulder, was passing on the road, with a chembu in hand, when a cow started easing herself. At once the Brahmin paused, caught a handful of the urine sprinkled a little over his head, and took a few drops into his mouth. I am afraid, Miss Bedford, that by mentioning this incident, I might be giving a rare opportunity to the Miss Mayos of the world, to turn the spot light on stray occurrences like this, and call it India, while using all their hideous devices to prevent the revelation of all the beauty and civilisation and culture and philosophy, that has been India from remotest antiquity—and who but the Brahmins were the givers and custodians of such a civilisation?

In the East, man is vile according to Bishop Heber, just because in his ignorance he bows down to wood and stone, but the West stands self-condemned by the search-light of the very religion it professes and the scientific knowledge it boasts of. Neither religion nor science has ever made the West as a whole a superior moral force for any Westerner to presume to mock or condemn India and the East in general terms. At present, the Orient is judging the Occident by the latter's own standard, and finds all its boastings empty and meaningless applied to the conduct of the whole people. The East is asking the Western missionaries uncomfortable questions and whereas there are those, whose love for God and their fellow-men has made them take up the cross for its own sake and in all humility bear reproof and benefit by it, when un-Christian or devilish conduct in their own race is pointed out, there are others, who find justification for it, by reading their own interpretation into Scriptural statements. One well-known paper, which in spite of some really useful articles, to my mind preaches the Gospel in a spirit of controversy, rather than that of love, among some of the unconvincing statements frequently published in its columns, once gave such an unusually startling reply to one of the queries that I have never been able to cease wondering what effect such irresponsible interpretations will produce on the minds of genuine truth seekers. An enquirer had asked the editor, why Christian nations go to war, and

got the reply which I believe, made every Christian who read it blush with shame--that Christ had bidden His followers to offer their own other cheek, when smitten on one, but not the cheeks of their wives and children as well! A very clever answer, I admit, but I wonder, if that would have been Christ's own answer, if the question had been put to Him straight. As an Indian I can see what the Westerner cannot without understanding the Indian mind see that such ingenious answers repel, rather than draw the hearts of the Orient to a religion introduced by the West in this spirit. But am I right in condemning others without setting an example myself? It is good that we are told each other's faults.

My reflections carry me too far from my theme. I have mentioned the first remembered occasion of my seeing a Brahmin man. Another time, a girl friend came bursting into our house, announcing, "Papathis are coming" (Brahmin ladies are coming). We all ran in excitement to the door to see the Papathis. The ladies wore their sarees according to one of the three or four styles indicating the highest caste all over India. The usual style for every one in South India is to have gathers and a train in front, wearing the end of the saree like a cape on the shoulders. These ladies, according to the fashion of their own particular set, had drawn part of the train between their legs and tucked it in the waist behind, so that the back view showed the saree somewhat like trouser leggings, with the legs exposed up to the knees.

I take a leap from one topic to another, without a proper introduction. Have I mentioned the pie-dogs of George Town, with the tawny colour predominant, but having other hues as well? Sometimes they have only hides without a specimen of a hair left on their mangy bodies. These creatures live on anything that comes in their way, gratefully masticating garbage, cow's manure, rags and all such indigestible stuff, or cling tenaciously to a marrow bone without a scrap of meat on it, hoping to find some nourishment somewhere. They are dogs whom nobody owns or cares for, and yet arranging their own beats, and guarding the blocks from intruders with more than human loyalty, dogs, many of which go rabid in summer and are starved to death by the dozens, and carried off dangling by their hind legs from the poles flung across the shoulders of their slayers. If I have not mentioned, then it is a serious omission, for there are dogs and dogs, and a tale is not necessary to hang thereby. You not only see them, but hear them baying at the moon, disturbing your sleep at nights. An attack with a volley of stones by an outraged sleeper, has only a temporary effect of driving them a few yards off with their tails between their legs, but a permanent one of increasing their howls and your own vexation.

CHAPTER X

THE BURMESE

IN time, we moved into a new house. Mary began to wear sarees, and though Sophie was puny, she could no longer go in frocks, or skirts and jackets, when her younger sister had to put on sarees. So, the two of them had their freedom restricted like Emmie's and had to stay all day indoors, and go out only in the company of father and mother or other elderly people. Mary still continued her studies at Northwick with her eldest sister, but whenever she came home, she deeply envied my own liberty, to stand on the front verandah or to play on the road, as I liked. Only a little over thirty years previous to the time of my writing these memoirs, the now unbelievable thing existed, as Indians, even after they had adopted Christianity, had not altogether cast off the purdah. Poor Mary, the spirited girl, suffered her social imprisonment more bitterly than her meek and patient elder sister. She had to depend on her brothers and me for her shopping errands, however close to the house the stall may be. We knew how to exploit her, and Davy was utterly unscrupulous,

in this levy of tolls. We demanded a full-quarter share of the sweets purchased as the price of our fetching them, and Davy often gave her the balance after appropriating what he considered to be his own by right. Once he took the thicker end of a maize cob, that he had bought for Mary which caused the poor girl to shed many a bitter tear. Between Emmie and Mary, the former was not only more attractive, but seemed to be conscious of it too. She loved to stand at the window and gaze into the street and I noticed that when men looked at her, she appeared to be pleased. She had more of her mother's looks than her father's, and later on took after my mother in weight also. My mother was now no longer slim and was well on her way to the corpulence which spoilt her figure in later middle age. Mary had a fine voice. Once in a way, when father played on his violin, she would sing in accompaniment. Sophie, always ailing from some complaint or other, now began to suffer from itch. Her two hands were enclosed in bags, and she had to be fed by some one. Always dyspeptic, her suffering was again acute at this time. From her, Willie caught the itch, which took an aggravated form, owing to the dirty games the little fellow used to play in the street. He made a scene every time he was given a wash and required the attendance of two or three people to hold him, when bathing or having his sores dressed, and once that was done and his struggles and howls ceased, he started scratching again, tearing off the bandages.

A new house means new neighbours. On one side was a small shop selling foreign liquors and cool drinks. Though I never saw the inside of the rooms, I could yet see the shop boys washing the bottles and keeping them out in the sun to dry. I have no great recollection as to who lived in the house on the other side, or whether there was a house at all or only a hotel or bakery, but our most interesting neighbours were in front of us. These were a number of Burmese medical students, with a couple of Chinese who were either students too or patients undergoing treatment and they all seemed to be paying guests or relatives of a middle aged Burmese couple who had two nephews of their own. Anyway, they all lived like a single family, and nobody appeared to be a mere lodger. The master of the house, who insisted on our calling him, 'uncle', was a quiet going man, in loose white calico drawers and shirt. His wife, our 'aunty', was the first woman smoker I had ever seen till then. Her home dress consisted of a bright coloured silk lungi, and usually, a short white silk or cotton jacket, with long sleeves but just touching the top of her nether garment at the waist. Her hair was done up flat on the top of her head, and her chief pastime seemed to be, watching the street sights, squatting on her heels at the top of the steps, leading from the road to the house; while she puffed away at her cheroot, or went on eating about a pound's weight of soaked rice which she kept in a fold of her dress, taking bites from a piece of cocoanut for a relish.

The China man, I remember, would appear on the front verandah, dressed in loose white pyjamas and shirt like Uncle, but he had a long rat's tail instead of a neat crop. He seemed to have been suffering from some eye trouble, which the medical students were treating. The Burmese had all curious names, beginning with "Maung". One was Maung Du Bin, another, Maung Shoo Bin, the older of the two nephews was Maung Bama, and the other Maung Batha and so on. I have no idea of the real names of the rest, since we had used only nicknames for them. One young man used to be in his national costume all the time, a coloured lungi, the nether garment, and a jacket or bunyan for the back. Except in any difference in colour or stuff, I do not know if Burmese masculine garments can be told apart from the feminine. The other chaps wore pyjamas and shirts at home, and the full European dress when going out; occasionally, their own national costume also. In those days spectacles were a rare sight and one of the Burmese students wearing a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles was honoured by us with the title of Mr. Gold Specks. Uncle and Auntie and most of the young men liked us and the Eurasian children of respectable families used to go and play with them, as there were no youngsters in their own house. They would treat us with peppermints, chocolates, lozenges and chewing gum, which added zest to their popularity with us.

Sergeant Nigel's two children, the handsome large eyed Robert and his beautiful, queenly

sister, Ethel, a lily herself, in snow white dress, were constant visitors. Robert being a boy, I did not admire him so much, but Ethel, I adored. I would often ask myself whether she was a human maiden or a sylph. It is not all white girls who are so serenely beautiful, or so naturally elegant. Every frock and every colour seemed to be the one and only dress that brought out the best effect, but in white, a snow white dainty muslin gown, with three rows of frills for the skirt and her dark hair made into two plaits falling over her shoulders, Ethel was no flesh and blood creature, but a vision. How proud Robert must have been of such a sister!

Though our Burmese friends were so nice to us, their conduct and manners in all their business dealings appeared to be highly questionable. I am unable to say now, whether it was due to a dishonest spirit, or out of love for fun and practical jokes, they acted in the way they did. As far as I can remember, they had four servants, a man and a woman, and a young boy and a young girl. What their real names were I do not know, but the two adults answered to the name of Periya Payya (big boy), and the two youngsters to, Chinna Payya (small boy), irrespective of their sex. The whole day long, shouts of Periya Payya, and Chinna Payya, would be ringing in the house, and the four Payyas must have had a most unenviable existence, waiting upon so many individuals at once.

Madras beggars are an obstinate, perverse lot, but our Burmese friends were more than a

match for them. If they took it into their heads to say, "Po" (go away) to some tramp who came to their door, no amount of importunity, no convincing proof of his real distress, could make them change their minds. In one instance, Aunt, in her usual way, was squatting at the head of the small flight of steps, munching her soaked rice and cocoanut, while, Hippo, the fat man who was most of the time in his national costume, sitting on his heels by her side, was conversing with his landlady, when an old mendicant climbed the steps and asked for alms. "Po," bellowed Hippo. The beggar did not 'po'. Another "Po," came out with a louder explosion, but that did not make any impression either. A last "Po," exhausting all Hippo's patience, the heavy man flung himself on the scraggy old wretch and sent him sprawling on to the road below, where he collided the first thing with a cow tethered to a drainage pipe and caused that creature to break loose and run amuck. Some horrified spectators gathered round the whimpering old man and helped him to his feet, as they expressed their indignation in various ways at the Burman's brutality, and gathered the coins and grains of rice strewn on the pavement from the beggar's bowl, adding something to the contents from their own pockets. The poignant remarks, however, fell flat on guilty ears, probably because our friends did not understand Tamil abuses, but after his own fury was spent, when he saw his victim, snuffing and shaking off the dust from his limbs, Hippo ran upstairs,

and from the balcony, dropped one copper after another till the beggar had collected two annas.

Though fruit vendors paid heavy tolls here, before they were allowed to depart with their goods after a bargain, yet they would not avoid the place, probably making up in the prices they charged for the fruits for what was unlawfully seized from their baskets. When a basket was set down on the verandah, and haggling and huckstering over the prices was carried on between the chief customer and the vendor, one young man would creep up behind the seller, seize a fruit and walk off with it, and when the unfortunate victim turned round to see what had happened, another chap from another side would carry off some more fruit. While the wronged man was straining every nerve to be on his guard, like mischievous monkeys, these students pelted him with the rinds of the stolen fruit, or squeezed an orange peel into his eyes.

The baker usually provided fun of a different stamp. The boys would select the buns and muffins and whatever they wanted, and leaving their purchases with the baker would scamper upstairs yelling for the Periya Payyas and Chinna Payyas. They stood on the balcony and let down a string, to which either the baker or one of the Payyas had to fasten the purchases one at a time for their young masters to haul up. The least mishap would send the loaf or bun hurtling down into the street gutter below, and the Payya or

the baker whoever had done the fastening, had to replace it.

The coolies who were hired to carry home the purchases of provisions and green grocery, the Burmese made at the Kothwal Chawdy, little knew when they crossed the threshold, that they were entering a dragon's den, from which none emerged without a sorely battered skin and bruised flesh. The trouble was usually about the hire. Madras coolies and hackney drivers know how to impose upon and swindle strangers, but our Burmese friends could pay them in their own coin, perhaps, with an interest too. Now and then, we saw one of the boys in a gaudy lungi and shirt, with a coloured scarf round his head, and a gaily painted Japanese sunshade in his hand, returning from the market followed closely by a black cooly, with only a dhoti and a turban on, carrying a heavy basket on his head. Not long after they entered the house, the doors and windows would be shut, and fastened inside while a series of dismal howls and cries of despair rose within the walls and told their own story, till at last the front door would fly open and the poor victim burst forth for all he was worth, looking wild and dishevelled. Once gaining the safety of the public road, he would wax eloquent in Tamil Billingsgate, swearing at his assailants and making doleful complaints to the on-lookers, as he wept and pointed to his bumps. I believe that the one who fared the worst under our neighbours' unfeeling jokes was a fortune-teller, a short but important looking

man, who entered the dragon's den, like many a cooly from Kothwal Chawdy, but unable to foresee his own future. The usual result followed. Perhaps he was not discreet enough in interpreting some young fellow's fortune, perhaps he was unable to see into somebody's past, whatever the trouble might have been, he paid well for going to the wrong place. The doors and window shutters were banged and fastened, blood curdling cries issued from within, and while the neighbours were coming to their front doors and pedestrians halted to see what was going amiss, the doors were flung open and a sorely belaboured scarecrow of a soothsayer with all his self-importance vanished, flew out of it followed by one of the boys with a rolled up mat in his hand in the act of striking the wretch with it again. But the latter had already gained the street, howling and limping and complaining to the groups gathered there, one of whom had already fetched Sergeant Nigel to the spot. Investigation followed and the incriminating evidence against the boys being overwhelming, each of them was made to pay a fine of three annas; for it was after all, Sergeant Nigel, the papa of their friends Robert and Ethel.

On one occasion some of these young rogues, perhaps after an excursion, returned to their lodgings in a victoria. There was the inevitable altercation at the time of paying the fare. The young men paid the driver what they thought was reasonable, in spite of the latter's loud protests that he was swindled. While the coachman was making loud and vociferous demands for the full

fare, the boisterous troop bolted the doors and ran upstairs. The discreet coachman had gathered the reins in his hands to send the horse galloping with a jerk, and started to indulge himself with all manner of obscene and vituperative abuse, calling the boys, "Bloody Burman buggers" and so on, when Maung Bama appeared at the balcony flourishing a stout ruler in his hands and crying: "What do you say?" The jerk was given, and coach and driver slipped in a moment out of range of the menacing missile.

In spite of their unfeeling pranks on vendors, and coolies, coachmen and rickshawallahs, beggars and soothesayers, the Burmese remained our favourites to the end. They were full of humour and fun and animal spirits and loved to sport with children. They would take Robert on one shoulder and Harry on the other, run upstairs and downstairs, like Goosey Goosey Gander after a good dose of Kruschen Salts, vault over pieces of furniture and prance on the top of the castellated wall of the balcony. They would shoot chocolates, peppermints and orange pieces at us, just for the fun of watching us scramble for them. They gave us cigarette pictures and safety matches which were to us priceless in the days of lucifer matches. To the decent Eurasian children and to the children of our house, they were very nice.

Once they had a fair little guest, who with her whitish golden coloured skin, her bright silk robes and sashes, which she changed three or four times a day, the gold or velvet sandals on

her dainty feet, and her black hair coiled up flat on the crest of her head, round which there gleamed a string or chaplet of jasmynes, a plume of lavender leaf, stuck in like a feather in the centre of the coil, was verily a picture of loveliness. I have always been a votary at the shrine of beauty, and this fairy child soon captured my heart and imagination. I would dream of my coming into a fortune and of being allowed to please myself as I liked and I would speculate on the kinds of dresses I would buy and the number of times I would change under the impression that the dress alone would bring about a transformation in looks and complexion. How foolishly ignorant and innocent are childhood days, in a world of callousness, selfishness, greed, dishonesty and wrong doing! This lovely little girl knew neither English nor Tamil, nor any other language but her own, and hence it was exceedingly difficult for us to play with her. I for one have never been a success at breaking the ice, always retreating into my shell like a snail, even when I was dying to make an acquaintance. People, even my own parents and brothers and sisters who have known me so well, have called me fussy, priggish and giving unnecessary airs to myself. I have been hurt by such remarks and accusations, but even these smarts have failed to lash me up. In spite of my brothers spending most of their spare time and play time with these neighbours, and their own friendly overtures to me, I have never been into their house beyond an occasional flight as far as their door.

and flying back to mine, before anybody had realised that I had called. When this little Burmese girl came, Davy and Harry would urge me to go and keep her company, but though I worshipped her from a distance, I could never bring myself to go to her. Once when the two nephews came to our house, the little lady came pattering in her sandals and stood for a while near the steps, but when the nasty person that I was I retreated indoors, the poor visitor went away. My sisters being grown-up girls had to keep a sort of purdah in company with my mother, and could not come out, especially when the students were there. Hence without playmates of her own age, she would play at giving parties by herself, filling her doll tea cups, plates and dishes and emptying them into the road. Our Burmese friends left when the medical college closed for a vacation, and we never saw them again; perhaps, if they had returned they took a house in some other part of the City.

CHAPTER XI

LATER CHILDHOOD

I used to hear fearful stories of Somberies, literally, lazy louts, but actually the roughs and desperadoes of Madras ; how the whole livelong day, they sat indolently on fences or culverts without any reasonable occupation, and when the leaf plates were thrown out of houses after a meal, they scrambled with the street curs for the scraps of food left in them ; and how when a person bore a grudge to another, he had only to ply a Somberi or two with drink and the promise of a reward, when the fellows would even take out a life with no deadlier weapon than a soda bottle. Though I have often seen healthy and robust fellows sitting on fences and culverts doing nothing at all, it was only once that I actually saw them scraping the remains of a meal from the leaf plates thrown on the rubbish heap and making a meal for themselves. It was really a ghastly sight. I also would wonder why some people went about the streets with long rakes collecting rags and others who picked up mango stones in their season from every dust-bin and muck heap and filling their baskets. Once I saw a poor boy, who was known to us with a large basket under his arm go

collecting the stones. Davy accosted him and asked what he wanted them for and the boy answered: "Suttugutu thunno" (to roast and eat). We too now and then roasted a mango stone and ate the kernel, but since it does not taste good, can anything but extreme hunger drive human beings to use them as food, if the boy had really spoken the truth?

Morning and evening we could see people going to market to make purchases for the day's cooking, and they were chiefly women, whether they were doing it for their own houses or for their mistresses. In those days, I do not know how it is now, even the wives and daughters of decent and well-to-do Madrasees set out to market with their baskets. The poorer Eurasians who had no chokras or ayahs to send out, would themselves take up the hampers and proceed. The other women usually sought company on the way, respectable ladies not hesitating to rub shoulders with servants as they went talking with familiarity, but we could see those in gowns, when they did not meet one of their own kind known to them, prefer solitude to the company of native women.

Among all these bazaar-going women, one used to be conspicuous, not only from the way she avoided company, but also on account of the curious stares she met with and the whispers that went round at the sight of her. Her neighbours were never tired of relating her story to new-comers. The woman was a native of a light brown complexion and though she

wore cheap clothes like the others of her class, she was dressed quite neatly, wearing a full blouse instead of a bust bodice and unlike the others who thrust their knot into the hair over one ear, she made a plait and coiling it wore it in the middle at the back of her head. By way of jewels she had a gold torque, a few glass bangles and Pondicherry anklets; nothing more. With bent head, and glancing neither to the right nor to the left, this woman would make straight for the market and back again to the house, sometimes carrying astride on her hip, a white child looking like a Glaxo Baby, of the advertisement pictures. It was her child and herein lay her story.

She was both house-keeper and mistress to a pure blooded Englishman, called Mr. Shaw. She had several children all inheriting their father's colour more or less, so that none who knew not the history, by a casual glance could guess that the native woman was the white children's mother. The eldest, Harry, was employed in the harbour and I have heard people say, that on his slender earnings alone, the whole family depended; for Mr. Shaw being a hopeless drunkard cared little for the comforts of the family, and Harry a tall, strapping but sad looking youth, was also his mother's champion against his father's drunken brutality. The children with whom we were familiar, were Michael in old knee-breeches and a coat; Bonnie, the handsomest of the lot, still in smocks, and Bertie for whom Michael acted as a sort of ayah, there being no daughters

in this family to mind the baby brother. Except Harry who had to go out for work, the other children were all bare-footed. They would be grateful if anybody gave them a coin, or something to eat, and spent most of their time playing on the pials of their neighbours' houses. Whatever was given to Michael, he shared it with his two younger brothers, but Bonnie whom everybody petted, would not part with a scrap of anything he got, though poor Michael would hold out his hand and say: "Bonnie, won't you give me a little? Didn't I give you some of my peppermints the other day?" But Bonnie who held the eatable in his smock made like a bag in front by catching it, was adamant.

The Jones' family lived close to us. They had a pet chimpanzee in a cage. We were sometimes allowed to see the animal. One of the boys, Basil, was blind on account of an attack of small-pox in infancy. They were a white family too. It was very sad to see the poor child under such a terrible scourge, being so merry and playful and getting acquainted with new people and recognising old friends by touching and feeling them, like my grandfather. He had a sweet chubby little brother Georgie, so sweet as he toddled about in a short loose white wrapper with his golden head above it and lisping indistinctly, words which were a mixture of Tamil and English. Like other tiny tots, he climbed the steps to the front verandah, with the same foot negotiating each new step, and the other brought to its side. This wee little chap had a

wee little kitten, which he used to handle as if it were an inanimate toy, and push it into other people's windows, watching from a distance the result of his mischief, and if anybody asked the little culprit who put it in the window, he would answer in Tamil. "Naun alla" (not me) in baby language. Like other tiny folks too, he had to be mightily coaxed to eat his food. His mother had a job taking him here and there, with his rice and curry in a saucer and giving him one morsel on the pial of one house, and another on that of another, but trotting him about all the time, threatening to give away his dinner to the doggie, if he did not eat it, telling stories about Lady Moon, or shouting for the Boochie man to come and carry off Georgie in his bag.

Though the Nadars lived in Kilpauk, and our mutual visits were few and far between, when one, however, occurred, it was a great event in our lives. The Nadars were the folks in whose garden I had plucked rose buds thinking that they were baby guavas. Sometimes my father gave my mother a whole day off to spend with her old time friends when they invited us, though he himself never went there. We looked forward to such occasions as if we were starting on a longed for pilgrimage.

Mr. Arpuda Nadar, a vakil, and Mr. Asirvadam Nadar, a doctor, were two brothers, who had married two sisters, their own first cousins and lived under the same roof with their widowed old mother and the orphan children of one of

their sisters. The two brothers had some married daughters, who sometimes came to spend a holiday in their maiden home, and I suppose during the visits of one or the other, we were invited there. The two Mrs. Nadars were my mother's contemporaries, so that in their families many children were our own contemporaries, from Emmie downwards. Grannie, as every one called the old lady, who was the mother of the vakil and the doctor, and the mother-in-law as well as paternal aunt of the two sisters, was usually occupied with working woollen designs on canvas; we helped her to wind or unwind the wool and begged for bits of it to trim our plaits. In this house there was an aged parrot, who amused every one with his inexhaustible store of sentences. One of the boys, Balasingam, was a bird fancier, and there was at least one of his pets, always perching on his shoulders or finger or a stick that he sometimes carried in his hand. He had bulbuls, mynas, a shrike and some finches once. In the house there was a dovecote with white and grey pigeons in plenty. Their small white eggs I would handle to examine but used to be told that they would not hatch, if touched. I had the greatest aversion to dogs and cats and nothing could induce me to make friends with or even tolerate the advances of the dogs and cats in this house. It is only rabbits I liked among animals as pets.

On one occasion, we arrived at this delightful paradise early in the morning. Though we had taken coffee before starting, as dinner was not

expected to be ready before one o'clock that day, they gave us refreshments soon after our arrival, the younger children being all served in a separate room. They spread dinner mats on the floor and laid a large plate in front of each seat. Then they served each of us with two dosais and some mutton curry. I forgot to be economic with the relish, and ate it liberally with one dosai and found there was nothing of it left for the other and I was too shy to ask for more. I consumed the remaining dosai without curry or chutney or pickle and found that it tasted horridly sour. Presently they passed round to us glasses of panan saar—unfermented palmyra juice.

I did not notice much how the boys spent their time, though I knew Willie clung to mother's saree and would not leave her. Mother told my sisters to go and help the big daughters of the house in the cooking and serving, whereas the matrons chiefly whiled away their time, squatted on the mats spread on the verandah, by disburdening themselves of the volumes of news reserved for one another since the latest previous meeting, while the older girls overhearing the stories, the jests and remarks sometimes left their work and joined the matrons to hear some particularly interesting anecdote, and be chid back to their business, with motherly rebukes for young girls being so inquisitive. Even the younger children would leave off playing in order to listen to the gossip and scandal. Navaneetham, one of Mr. Arpudam's daughters, and Karuna, the

older of the orphan girls, were my playmates, though poor Karuna, being perhaps a destitute, was often called away to help the big girls and the servants in the house-work. Bhagyam the younger orphan had a better time, but she was too small for our company and we had to admit her only because she used to feel offended if we left her to herself. These girls had a friend in Vijiayam, a professor's daughter, and being eager to show me off, they took me to call on her. No other incident of this visit remains so pleasant in my memory as the shady road, where portia, peacock's pride and other trees growing in the garden enclosures of the bungalows, with their branches overhanging the road, dropped their blossoms, on the pavement and I, much to the annoyance and amusement of my friends, halted every now and then to gather the flowers like Little Red Riding Hood on her way to her grandmamma's. At home, however, we played with dolls and had our own juvenile gossip.

Dinner that day was very late and we sat down to eat it with a ravenous appetite, and a right royal feast it was that was spread before us. Sambar with slices of brinjal, mince meat balls both fried and stewed, the flesh of a fat hen or two in thick gravy, vegetable curries, chutneys, and rasam. The usual remarks: "Why so many dishes for one meal? Really you ought not to have taken so much trouble. The meeting is the great thing to-day," by mother, and "oh, that's nothing; don't worry," by her friends were exchanged and next, the well deserved praise for

the excellent preparations and culinary skill displayed and the mild and courteous disclamation of any extraordinary ability came in their turn. We could overhear many compliments exchanged. After everybody else in our room had finished their meals and gone, my friends and I were left behind and now came an extraordinary demonstration of friendship and affection, which I hope nobody else will copy. We had only a little more rice left in our plates. Navaneetham insisted on my taking a ball from her own plate and feeding me with it from her own hand, the dirty rice with the dirty hand. I pleaded that I was already stuffed to bursting point, but no pleading or argument availed me, and I gulped down the ball with a sense of nausea. Nor did the abomination stop there; Karuna came with hers next and I yielded with loathing in my heart to another large dose of abomination, then to crown all other horrors, Bhagyam now offered me a dripping ball from her own plate. I utterly refused to accept any more filthy tokens of friendship, outwardly excusing myself that she was too small for me. The poor motherless girl looked sadly and reproachfully at me, saying that I did not care for her, and goodness! imagine my having to please her. I choked and spluttered and almost vomitted the dinner which I had enjoyed so much. When I coughed violently, the girls patted my head saying, that some one far away was thinking of me just then. That is what we in India tell anybody who gets choked while eating. I feel sick at the very recollection

of this incident. Such a filthy and insanitary demonstration of friendship I have seen only in Madras and nowhere else fortunately.

It was about this time that the events happened, which broke up the family and ruined the lives of so many of us for all time in this world. I thought that that was the first enactment of the foul drama, but subsequently learnt, to my bitter cost, that it was only a re-enactment of an earlier series of acts. One afternoon, a splendid equipage pulled up at our door, rousing our excitement, and attracting the curiosity of the inquisitive neighbours. A tall fair man with a clean shaven face and classic features, dressed in a white silver-laced dhoti, a long black alpaca coat, a white silver-laced turban and scarf, alighted. He wore sandals on his feet and I could see that his coat buttons were of gold and the gold chain of his watch had sapphires and amethysts hanging from the links here and there, whereas the man had a pair of glittering ear-rings consisting of one large diamond for each ear and there were rings set with jewels on all his fingers. Between the two eyebrows, in the centre of the forehead, over the bridge of the fine aquiline nose, there was a speck of a black tilakam or dot. Father and the boys had gone to college, my sisters except Sophie, who had been taken to Sunderkote for a change, were in the boarding, and there were only my mother and Willie and I at home. The greetings between the stranger and my mother, shocking and paralysing me as it were, however made it clear

to me that they were not new to each other. My dislike for this bold stranger turned to loathing, when he took me in his arms and smothered me with kisses. He then patted my mother on the back, and placed a hand over her shoulder, gazing into her face. With my blood boiling I observed all this and heard his interjections regarding the change in my mother's appearance, and if ever one could see the animal light of guilty love in any woman's face, I saw it then in my mother's eyes. It is with drops of blood from a tortured heart and not with ink that I am recording this about a mother dead and gone and from whom except when her guilt was remarked upon, or interfered with, we had experienced nothing but self-sacrificing love. But she was utterly heartless as to the mental torture she was inflicting on her children by her shameful conduct, and the ineffaceable blot she was casting on our names, that would keep us from lifting up our heads at any time all our mortal lives. Even little Willie in his own way understood that she was doing something that was against a woman's modesty or chastity. She blamed my father, the more fiercely and pitilessly, the more she heard caustic remarks on her own profligacy, as if a woman's abandonment to her lusts were the remedy for her husband's severity. She cared neither to honour her own father's memory, nor to protect her own children from an infamous name, and so long as she was by nature capable of debasing herself, even so long did she do it, and do it openly too, though in

later life she sought for respect and grew furious if any of those innumerable people, before whose very eyes she had cast all modesty to the winds, alluded to her frailty in their private conversations. Oh, wives and mothers, whoever may happen to read this and for whose sake alone I write what is wringing my heart, think of your own position in the eyes of the world, when in advancing age you wish to be respectable, and think also of the irreparable wrongs you are doing to your own offspring, to whom you think you have done your duty, if you simply feed and clothe them, while blasting their fair name for all time by your filthy conduct, and without giving them the holy guidance for the formation of a strong character, while God has entrusted them to you in their tender and innocent years. Now, to go back to the story, the allusions to my father during their conversations were anything but complimenatary, making me feel like driving a knife into the intruder's heart.

"I had a job to trace you down here; it was only recently that I heard your husband was a teacher in the Christian College. It was there that I made cautious enquiries through a spy as to your residence and his working hours. Our Rajah is spending a few months here, and my present residence is Mylapore." He went on like that for some time more. I conceived a violent dislike to the man and hated my mother for her freedom with him, and for undergoing all his caresses in front of her own young children. To make matters worse, she gave me

some money and asked me to take Willie to a shop at the far end of the street, to buy lollipops for him and me. There was nobody in the house, the servant had not yet come back for her evening work. Still I had no choice but to go. I felt my whole nervous system giving way, and the blood gone out of my face. I ran with Willie as best I could, and hastened back to the house, to find it made fast from within. I had to stand and batter for a good while, before a guilty woman came and opened the door, and made me smart with her tongue for making that noise. My heart sank to the depths of hopeless despair. An Indian woman who makes herself scarce in the presence of a stranger man, welcoming him and shutting herself up in the house with him!

Miss Bedford, do you think that I have overstepped the limits of my own womanly modesty by setting forth the events so plainly? It is, believe me, the outcome, not so much of immodesty as stabbing, maddening pain. Anyway, the acts were done. Is it vulgar or unwomanly to state the naked truth in its nakedness, especially, when it might rouse and stir to life some wanton woman's sense of shame at her own abandonment, so that for her children's sake at least, she lives honourably and lives to be blest by them? The thing that has burnt itself into my heart, has left unhealing scars, and they cannot use polished language to please cultivated tastes.

God's commandment, 'Honour thy father and mother,' we had learnt by heart in Sunday School, but we had more terror for the father, and more scorn for the mother than honour for either of them. I do not justify our feelings. Far from that. But I am only stating the fact. The children who gave much anxiety were Emmie and Davy, who always argued points with mother and criticised and condemned her as if she had been one of us. When these wretched events happened, they grew more and more reckless, and openly despised her, who had scattered to the winds with her own hands her moral authority over us. But this did not happen all at once. We had always resented father's unnecessarily ruthless domination, and by instinct, sided and protected mother. Now came a fiery ordeal of prolonged hell flame for our young lives. The mother had forfeited all our sympathy by taking up a line of action, which every instinct in us abhorred. But if only father came to know what she was doing!

Oh God, we were too young to hope that we could outlive the consequences. Have not wronged men, in the madness of their anguish, taken out the lives of the wretches who had betrayed them? This terror, this nightmare made us cowards and liars. Our sympathies were definitely on our father's side now, but we wronged him and deceived him by shielding his wife. His own severity and exaggerated ideas of authority paled into insignificance before my mother's shameless and reckless profligacy. She trained us

to tell the most abominable lies and we told them unblushingly, till some of her sons and daughters became incurable liars. They lied to her also, but she believed them, even if friends or relatives warned her. She would be furious with the person who told her that her Emmie or her Davy, was taking the path of moral ruin; for they themselves denied the allegations and pointed to the misdeeds of other people's children, and against other people's children my mother was ready to believe anything and discuss their vices with enthusiasm.

Sophie, poor Sophie who was incapable of telling a lie, suffered much affliction at her mother's hands. Falsehoods have flown glibly from my own lips, but there were times when conscience could not be stifled and I have accused my mother for teaching me to tell lies in childhood, at which she would shatter my nerves with unutterable words of abuse and imprecations for judging her, who had made so many sacrifices for me and asking me why I should have learnt to tell lies if I had been such a saint. Whenever I said anything like that, she would call me a hypocrite, who kept things deeply in my mind and was capable of speaking cruel words, that went like a knife into other people's hearts. God knows, what long years, and how relentlessly, she nursed her own grievances, and not only mocked and taunted the people concerned with stinging words whenever possible, but utilized every opportunity to complain of her wrongs to everybody. Christ says, that it is better for a

person to plunge into the sea with a mill-stone round his neck than to mislead one little child. Oh that parents, in Christian homes at least, would keep this in mind, and lead helpless trusting children into good ways, instead of asking them after they have grown up in sin, why they should have copied the parent's evil ways. My heart breaks to write these things of a mother lying silent and dead in her grave. In life she used to call me ungrateful, if I tried to make her see her own shortcomings, while she was discussing other people's defects and failings. She thought that fault finding with her was my favourite pastime. But on her death-bed she saw, and free from all earthly passions her spirit will now see, what she refused to see in the long years God had given to her on earth. Yes, she will see that while she was furious, if anyone pointed out her own faults, how she herself had never spared others. Since she suffered tortures on her death-bed for wasting all God-given opportunities to make her life a blessing, I am sure her spirit will rejoice, if these memoirs could make some other reckless woman see herself, as God sees her, and at least for her children's sake, returns to the straight path. Her soul can now clearly see that far from aspiring to saintship, I have been mercilessly condemning myself for my own misdeeds, all the while that she thought I was playing the role of a saint. There are two kinds of sinners: one kind who refuse to see or admit their own iniquities; or excuse themselves very

easily by putting the blame on others or on circumstances; the other kind, who examine every thought and word and deed of theirs, and are ashamed and pained for their wrong doings instead of seeking reasons to justify themselves. The latter fight and fight a long and bitter warfare against the evils in themselves till they die. The former, because they feel they are only behaving naturally, do not think it necessary to give up their old ways.

The visits of the stranger in whom you could not have failed to recognise, the dewan of Dostanabad, grew more frequent; children's lips might be sealed but the nature of the interviews was such as could not be kept in darkness. Who could blind the eyes or bridle the tongues of inquisitive neighbours? As soon as the man arrived, Willie and I were sent out. The house perhaps not being very convenient for their vile purpose, the Dewan seems to have persuaded my mother to shift into a more suitable one. While her husband was thinking that she was safe behind closed doors, my mother had the audacity to set out with the stranger in search of houses to let. They took Willie and me too. She returned home with her children, while her paramour left us on the main road, after kissing her. Who but those that have lived in India know, how kissing is a sign of utter abandonment, even if husband and wife kiss each other? Nobody kisses in public except little children; and except in ultra modern families, adults are not kissed even by their fathers and mothers, even in the privacy of their own homes. This

conduct of my mother and the Dewan was simply scandalising. One of the spectators, a woman, who did not know who we were, asked my mother what relation to her the man was who had kissed her, and Miss Bedford, my mother answered before her children, "My husband".

Before we had left the house, which had seen the renewal of the foul fiend's infamous visits, Madras was preparing herself for the reception of the Prince and Princess of Wales, our late King George, and Queen Mary. I heard much talk and saw much excitement, but beyond the paper decorations everywhere, I was not allowed to see more of the jubilant rejoicings. My sisters and Davy saw the Royal pair, because they were attached to some school or other. I was much disappointed when all the grown-ups and the boys were taken by my father one night to the harbour to see the cruiser in which Their Royal Highnesses had been touring, leaving Willie and me behind.

CHAPTER XII

NEW SURROUNDINGS ONCE MORE

HUMAN nature is elastic, especially child nature. Although I loathed the caresses of the beast, who had desecrated the home, I became more resigned to the inevitable that had become the order of the day. The foul wretch displayed a great affection for me, but so was every one whom I knew. I was always selected for special favours and fondling from among my sisters and brothers, till I came to regard this distinction as my right and in the established nature of things. My immediate interest was the new house and its neighbourhood. Sophie's constant ailments and some kind of eruptions we all had over the skin, made my father leave the previous house and move into an upstairs building in X-Street, Mannady. An old crony diagnosed out skin trouble as a kind of pox called agni maryata, recommending the application of a poultice made of some cooling herb which was a common weed everywhere. But even a common weed was a rare exotic in the brick wilderness where we lived. Our servant knew a place in Broadway, where it could be found since even the slightest amount of moisture anywhere could

find the plant creeping and spreading over the area. I went with Thayee to gather the herbs, and there saw that they were just laying the tracks for electric trams in Broadway, trams whose sight and sounds were soon to be such a common thing to us in X-Street.

For a long time I had been under the impression that all the inmates of a house in our neighbourhood belonged to the same family, since we used to take a whole house for ourselves, but here for the first time I fully understood that a house was taken for rent by some one and sublet to other tenants, each family seldom having more than one room for themselves and their things, and hardly any privacy at all. Women and children and poultry birds, too, when the last were not scouring the roads, spent their time on the inner verandahs and open court-yards, whereas men, whenever they were not out on their work or business, sat on the pials. The bath-room, a small roofed or roofless enclosure, round the only tap that supplied water to the whole house, the lavatory, the street verandah and the open terrace upstairs, if any, were common to all, and by turns each family had to keep the house-front neat and tidy by day and lit by night. At break of dawn and again when evening shadows lengthened, one could see the damsels sweeping the street verandahs and steps and the side of the road in front of their own houses, sprinkling the last with a solution of cow-dung and tracing beautiful patterns in powdered chalk. At nightfall, a castor-oil lamp,

consisting of a small clay saucer or pan with oil and wick was lit and kept in a recess in the wall provided for that purpose in each house.

We could see an isolated tree here and there, but the houses of middle class Europeans and Indian Christians had flowers and foliage plants growing in pots and even lovely creepers climbing and spreading over arches of wire or bamboo trellis-work. Sometimes these gardens were to be found on the roof and sometimes on the street verandahs and steps, and here and there in both places. I remember one case where a mature hibiscus grew from the pavement of the street verandah and bore its scarlet blooms under the overhanging roof. We had a second floor with a room and a terrace, and on the terrace we began to have a garden consisting of two roses, some tube roses, marjoram, jasmine, chrysanthemums and 'four-o'clocks'. How I loved the visits of bees and butterflies to these meagre flowers, and enjoyed watching the movements of ladybirds, I cannot describe.

The Salvation Army Headquarters building was close to us. I always loved to see their bhajana or street preaching parties; for both the European and Indian members wore the Indian uniform and marched along singing beautiful Tamil hymns, snatches of some of which linger in my memory.

"Naun meetka pattain, naun meetka pattain." (I am redeemed, I am redeemed) was one; "Jeyam peru vom, jeyam peru vom." (We will have the victory, we will have the victory) was another, and a third was the most beautiful of

all, beginning with "Alleluia thothiram, vana senai paduvar" (Alleluias, praises, the heavenly host will sing.) This last haunts me with sweet, distant and dreamy visions and melodies.

We had a glimpse of a temple in Mannady from our house, a pretty sight by itself, but prettier with its background of gohl mohurs in a blaze of flame-coloured flowers. Whenever we had an opportunity, we seized a small spray of these blossoms, as the pistils served the boys to play battledore, and the girls amused themselves for a while playing crackers with the sepals. Each sepal has a coloured lining, and when carefully rubbed with the fingers can form a bladder with the opening where it had been separated from the calyx. The girls placed a crushed sepal with its mouth to their lips and when the bladder had swelled, took it off keeping the opening tightly closed to prevent the air from escaping. Then the swollen thing was banged against the forehead where it burst with an explosion. I used to stick the leaves and flowers, in the cracks and holes of walls and floor and imagine the effect to be a park.

Sophie's hand was considered to be a lucky one. In my experience, superstitious tradesmen attribute a stroke of luck or misfortune in their day's business, to the merit or the defect in the hand of the very first customer of the day. Some street vendors who seemed to have had good luck on the days when Sophie made the first purchase, thereafter would come and beg her to make 'boni', the first purchase, even when there

was no necessity to buy anything. Often when neighbours wanted to make the purchase, my sister would be asked to pass the piece of money from the customer to the seller. On account of 'Sophie' we all got something extra for our money whenever we bought anything of these vendors. When, however, Sophie began to sicken, goody goodies shook their heads in depreciation of the 'boni' business, and imputed the evil eye to the sickness. At first the cronies tried to cast out the evil by waving some broom-sticks and dry red pepper over the patient and thrusting them into a flame where their crackling was essential for a sign that the evil spirit had departed. The next thing was to make Sophie wear a talisman, consisting of a small tube containing copper foil with inscriptions for protection against the devil, round her neck.

At this time the Russo-Japanese war was going on, but apart from hearing the names of these two countries, all I knew or remember about the war, was the transfer pictures that we bought for decorating our books depicting the scenes.

Now, I must introduce our new neighbours. The fact must not be forgotten that the houses were mostly in blocks, separated by lanes and alleys, nor the fact that a single house was usually tenanted by a number of families, not always the same, as one or the other was always moving out and new ones coming in. I confine myself only to those who have been fairly stationary for a sufficiently long time. The

house to our right was also an upstairs building, with one room on the topfloor occupied by a Mr. Gershom, a teacher in Sinclair's College, his young wife, Nesamani, and their little baby. The small terrace outside the room was common to all. In spite of the great difference in their ages, my mother and Mrs. Gershom were great pals. The latter was a good looking woman, whose jewels I used to admire, as, excepting mother, none of us had any but glass bangles and gold button ear-rings. My father had strictly forbidden even the boring of our noses in infancy, so that we could not even for fun wear nose jewels. Mrs. Gershom's ears had many bores all along the border, just like my mother's and like my mother's again, long disuse had only left marks and no holes for a great many, whereas for the only remaining open ones she had a pair of ear-rings set with real or imitation gems and hanging from these were a pair of gold wire tasselled pendants, trimmed with minute pearls called jimkies in those days. She had gem set buttons for the nose on either side, a small hoop and pendant hanging from the cartilage of the nose. The other jewels were a stiff gold collar, with a pendant of rubies, and a kasi malai or string of coins for the neck; kapus and golusus for the wrists, the former being circlets of hollow or solid gold bars and the latter some elaborately carved thing which was rather prickly; for the ankles she had silver golusus, anklets made of silver rings, or carved pieces; and for her waist, she had a silver belt set with bells. The baby's

cradle was in the centre of the room and wholly visible through the open doorway. It was only a rectangular basket, suspended from a beam by means of ropes and over the cradle was hung a horizontal board, from which dangled, attached to strings, various toys : Hanuman, the monkey-god taking his leap in the air, parrots, glass bulbs,—each a different brilliant colour,—to amuse the baby when he was in the basket. Mrs. Gershom's lullaby songs were sweet and beautiful, perhaps it was in the way she sang them, and they reminded me with unutterable sadness even while my mother was alive, of her own singing when rocking Willie in his cradle, before—as I thought—the serpent had entered and destroyed our home. Still my mother's voice keeps ringing in my ears, and I want her so ! In the madness of my pain I cry for those days to come back, but even, if that were possible, my departed peace of mind would have fled for ever with my present knowledge of my own position in the house. What part would I have there ? The rhymes that my mother used to croon over Willie's cradle were, among the other airs she sang, "Nee chayindhu thoongu pillayai ; Kan moodu kannai nee ;" (Baby, recline and sleep ; close your eyes darling) ; and "Naun dhoodhan agavendum," (I want to be an angel), and Mrs. Gershom singing the same now, my thoughts went back to other days.

The other tenants of the house, all lived downstairs, coming up only on business or for the

evening air. They were all Roman Catholics, I believe. Among them was a widowed apakarchi—opper seller—a woman of medium height, faded brown complexion which showed the original colour of the skin, in the shape of a bodice where that article of dress, no longer in use, had been before. Before break of dawn this lady opened her shop, which consisted of some portable clay ovens, taken out of the house and placed in a row on the pial. They were all lit, and over each she placed a clay opper pan, covering it with a lid containing live charcoals, for the cakes required heat both above and below for baking. A piece of rag twisted round one end of a twig like a swab was dipped in gingelly oil, that stood in a small clay dish near by, and the baking pan was first greased with it before receiving its spoonful of thinly mixed rice meal leavened with toddy. The meal stood in a big pot near the ovens, and by its side was a cup or mud dish, containing juice extracted from the cocoanut kernel. The apakarchi greased a pan, served a spoonful of meal into it, and holding the pan with a dish cloth gave it a turning and put it back over the fire covering it with a lid containing burning coals. The cake was done in an incredibly short time, when the bakeress took off the lid and removed the opper with a blade-shaped turner.

The round cake with its crisp brown border and its puffed and tender snow-white disc was placed on a plate or small tray and the cocoanut juice applied to the soft centre. There lay a big

basket tray near by, in which the oppers were all arranged in piles of pairs ; for as soon as the oppers were ready, they were placed one on top of the other, their discs together, their brown backs out. It required much experience, skill and vigilance on the part of Anthonyamma—that was the apakarchi's name, considering that she had so many pans to attend to at a time, and the oppers took such a brief period to be done, so that the least delay would result in the delicate things getting burnt. Soosai, the daughter, was her mother's assistant ; Soosai, who always brought her bowl of food to the staircase and ate it sitting on a step. A girl of eleven or twelve, short and fat, with undressed hair, a piece of cloth twisted round her middle, and another piece to cover her bosom, Soosai painted the centres of the oppers with the cocoanut juice as soon as her mother removed them from the pan, and joining two and two together, would pile them in circular rows in the large tray. Besides plain oppers, Anthonyamma baked and sold sweet oppers also, the meal for these being sweetened with jaggery and kept in a separate pot. If customers wanted eggs to be baked with their oppers, they had to get their own supply. From early dawn there were customers standing near the pial and clamouring to be served early. After attending to these till about seven o'clock, Soosai covered the tray containing the piles of oppers with a cloth and placing it on her head, started on her rounds to sell them in the streets. Her mother still continued to bake and serve those who came to

buy at the shop. By nine o'clock, the shop disappeared leaving no trace on the pial except, perhaps, where the ovens had stood.

Another family in that house at that time seemed to me very curious, though I have seen scores of such, since then. This consisted of a mother and daughter, both dark. The mother was a skinny woman of medium height, with tattooed patterns on her hands and legs, wearing her saree and bodice like Madras servants, and her koppu or knot of hair all to one side, and having large bores in her ears, which, however, did not stretch down to meet her shoulders. She adorned these same ears with coils of coloured strips of palm leaf, and her teeth and lips were perpetually stained with pan juice. The daughter, slightly fairer than the mother, passed for a Eurasian.

Helen was about fourteen years old; she wore frock and brushed her hair back from the forehead without a parting, the *coiffure la mode* in those days. The bath-room or enclosure round the water-tap, in this house, was roofless, and as but a low parapet divided our terrace from theirs, we could always look down the staircase of the other building, or into the bath-room from our own terrace. The bath-room floor was green with moss and damp, and in a corner stood an old kerosene tin, with some calediums growing therein. At this low tap squatting on her heels, with bare knees and feet, in a smutty frock, the straggling locks of her hair sweeping her face, Helen could be seen washing the clay kitchen utensils, polishing them with wood ashes from the oven and a

handful of straw or cocoanut fibre,—a black Cinderella who was to undergo a transformation every evening. The expression of chagrin on the poor girl's face, when she observed any of us looking at her, in her day dress and among her smutty and greasy dishes, was clearly visible to the on-looker. In the evenings, however, at the landing, above the flight of stairs, sitting in a basket arm-chair, with her knitting or sewing in her hands, and her work basket by her side, as she hummed or softly sang some English air, she was a vision. She was black as usual, except that she was clean and for the freshness imparted by Cherry Blossom face powder, but now she was a lady in black shoes and stockings, a white muslin gown with pannier sleeves and elaborately worked yoke, her flowing black hair kept in place with a fillet, or with a riband passing under the hair at the back and tied with a bow at the top of the head. A silk sash of the same colour as the riband girdled the waist, and the loose ends from the bow streamed behind. This was the self-same Helen, whom you saw as a cinder girl before the cool of the evening.

It was always amusing to hear the conversation between the mother and daughter. The father I never saw, though during our conversations in the evening, when she was playing the lady's part, she used to tell me her papa was a lawyer. However that might be, the mother used only Tamil and the daughter only English in their conversations, which sounded highly comical to

other ears. I suppose the older lady went to the bazaar both morning and evening, and I have an idea that she did Mrs. Gershom's shopping for the latter. Morning and evening the women going to market, went in companies, especially those from the same house. As Helen sat bending over her work, and if not actually taking part, since it was beneath her dignity to talk in Tamil, or gossip with native women, nevertheless listening, without apparent interest, to the news and rumours exchanged between Mrs. Gershom and my mother and sisters on either side of the parapet, we would hear the sounds of the opening and shutting of doors and voices in conversation, intimating that the ladies had returned from market. The Indian feminine voice is hoarse compared to the pitch of a white woman's tone, and in India, one used to see the native women in the process of evolution, assiduously imitating both the English voice and accent, not only when talking English, but even whenever they deigned to speak in the vernacular. Helen was faithful to the type, and every evening as soon as she heard her mother coming in, she would call out in that peculiar voice, which she was carefully cultivating: "What have you brought for us, ma?" The reply came in Tamil: "Erravum Kathrika" (prawns and brinjals) and some such things according to the nature of the purchase. The answer was soon followed by the speaker herself making her way up the stairs, with a rotten old bazaar basket smelling of sea things. On the landing she took out her purchases:

from the basket, arranging slices of some big fish or a heap of small fish, crab or shrimp along with the bendees, drumsticks or gourd and whatever vegetables had been bought, including the inevitable items of fresh ginger, cocoanut pieces, coriander leaf and green chillies. She harangued for a little while on the exorbitant prices demanded, or making other equally loud comments with theatrical gestures, and looking up alternately at Mrs. Gershom's face and mother's, inviting sympathetic remarks. Then she gave away to Mrs. Gershom what she had been commissioned to buy for her, and went down putting the other things in her basket again, to prepare the dinner.

Once, when mother and Mrs. Gershom were discussing the merits of the various products of the sea, both fresh and dry, the former told one of the delectable tales of that great legendary humourist, Tenali Rama, himself a Brahmin, whose favourite pastime was to tease other Brahmins for their greed and selfishness and meaningless customs. The story goes, that this hero of a hundred adventures, dodging even the death sentence passed on him by an irate monarch, one of the victims of his mischievous pranks, once sent round to all the Brahmins, packets of some chutney powder with his best compliments, expressing the pious hope that they would enjoy its flavour. The top layer of the contents consisted of some vegetable ingredients, but the bulk that lay underneath was nothing but finely powdered channangunni, minute prawns.

The Brahmin fellows who are a byword for their extraordinary capacity for eating, ate their rice with this new and rare kind of chutney powder with a gusto, and still smacking their lips and caressing their bulging bellies, ran to their benevolent friend to ask whether he had the patent, for such a savoury article. Out came the truth, and none but Tennali Rama, with that charmed life of his, could have survived to see the effects of such an announcement in the convulsions of the sons of a most sacred caste, to whom all animal food was execrable abhorrence.

Helen's mother pronounced an eulogy on her own favourite fish, vengannu, quoting in support of her own taste, an old saw running thus: "Un kannai yavadu kottu, vengannai vangu," (Even if you had to give your eye in exchange, don't miss buying a vengannu). This reminds me of a quaint advertisement of the merits of another kind of fish quoted by the saleswoman, well practised in all the tricks of traders all the world over, seeking to impose their goods on folks, whether there is need or no need for them. For breakfast we usually had sambar and karavadu (salt fish) or some chutney for a relish, all luxury being strictly kept out except when sisters came home. My mother was one day bargaining some dry fish and doubted the merits of a certain fellow, held out appraisingly by the seller, whereupon the latter, affecting to be shocked at her customer's ignorance, burst out with: "This is a dish fit for kings Amma; the queen serves her Consort and dances a jig

with glee to see him enjoying it. You just try this for yourself; I give you my head, if the neighbours attracted by the savoury smell from the dish, don't rush to your door with their plates of rice to beg for a help."

We left Helen's mother going down to prepare the evening meal. Sometimes in the evening mother and daughter would go out for a walk, or when there was service, to the church, a most incongruous pair, the mother a Madrased native, the daughter a missy; the former with her ayah fashion saree, side koppu, dollai kadu (ears with large bores), her pan filled mouth, bare-footed with tattooed skin, walking like a plebeian; the latter in her muslin frock, shoes and stockings, ribbons and sashes, with a thick coating of Cherry Blossom powder on her face, which she sometimes covered with a veil for protection against the dust, and wearing a hat pacing by her side 'like Lady Lally herself' as Emmie would say,—Sir Arthur Lally being the then, or a recent Governor of Madras.

As 'Lady Lally' generally spent her evenings on the roof sitting in her basket chair with her needlework, overhearing gossip and watching the people on the surrounding roofs, humming her favourite tunes, I sometimes used to ask her to sing something that had a special appeal for me. The request invariably put an end to the singing or humming at once, and Helen would excuse herself as having a 'hoarse throat'.

Another family downstairs consisted of a man of advanced middle age, a still youngish wife, two

boys and two girls. The eldest boy was abnormally fat, even the features on his face being indistinct, so to say. This lad, Ratnaswamy, who had already earned the nickname 'Anai' (elephant) even before we had known him and selected a suitable one, wore bobbed hair with a shaven patch in front and waddled about in a red ankle-length mundu—a cloth wound round both the legs—except when he went to school. His very voice sounded unnatural, perhaps on account of short breath or puffed cheeks. I once remember seeing, this vast uncouth weight of a boy waddling upstairs sulking against his mammy, who came after him begging him to come down and eat his dinner.

"I can't eat it. You knew that when you cooked it," he snapped. "But where can I go to provide roast mutton or chops for every meal; can't you manage with parpu kolambu (dhall soup) and vadagam chutney once in a way?" the mother asked. Who asked for roast meat or chops? I can easily manage with dhall pepper-water and dry meat or fish, "the boy returned. "I simply can't stand vegetables."

Vadagam, by the way, was some stuff of a most appetising smell for those who are accustomed to it and is prepared with mashed onions with a lot of other ingredients to give it flavour as well as to preserve it. Most people cannot stand dhall and vegetables. I cannot. But in childhood our tastes were not so much consulted. It was father, whose comforts were mother's first consideration regarding meals. He could

never tolerate a single meal without flesh or fish of some sort forming the bulk of his side-dishes. So, like the wives of our neighbours, who reserved the best dish for their lords, satisfied the children somehow, and put up with the rest for themselves, my mother would cunningly make a variety of dishes of any one kind of meat or fish and one kind of vegetable. If she bought fresh shrimps, say for mukkal anna (three quarter annas) or one panam (five quarter annas), and brinjal or drumstick for a paisa (quarter anna) an extra pie fetching coriander leaf, fresh ginger and cocoanut sufficient for one dish in those days, mother could either fry the bodies of the prawns in oil or cook them in gravy for father, make a thick sauce with the heads and a few of whatever vegetable there were, bendee, radish or gourd, cook another dish with the remaining vegetable and conclude the menu with molugutanni, so that when friends, as part of the exchange of compliments, asked: "What curry?" she could name at least four varieties. In the same way, out of, say, mutton and keerai thandu (spinach) her magic would produce four dishes. The soft parts of the mutton were prepared into a stew or something savoury for father, the other parts with the herb stalks, a sauce for all, the keerai heads cooked like a paste being a third dish, and pepper-water, which was always there, to make up for any insufficiency in curry. The number of items on the menu might mislead imagination; for in spite of the variety, there was not much of a help from each for so many members. But

still Madras wives, native or low class Eurasian, they loved to make a display.

Anai's mother, Mangalam was as lean as her first born was fat, in fact so very lean that Emmie's nickname for her was 'volu valai', some kind of eel. Her second son and the baby of the family was a stammerer, his mouth always agape as if he had transferred to that organ the function of the nose as a breathing apparatus, the latter being perpetually blocked up. Rajathi, the elder daughter, was a maiden fair, slim and pretty, whereas her younger sister Amrutam was black and squat and low statured. Mangalam acted the role of the old woman who lived in a shoe, towards her children. Their father gave them pocket money, but she charged for their chota. The father, Mr. Doraiswamy, was a harbour cooly, and on the terrace daily he would spread the sail canvas to dry. He gave his wife a fixed allowance for each day's marketing, but out of that she managed to save something for her own private use. When the girls commissioned their mother to buy them their tiffin or something, she turned part of that amount also to her private profit.

I was now old enough to observe and understand how Madrasi women of the lower middle class and even the well off ones, who had to depend entirely on their husbands for every trifling personal expense, made their own money. I noticed more than one method adopted by them in this process. Something would be saved from the daily allowance given to them; and they

organized several kinds of 'chit' funds. Each member of this association put away every day a handful of rice or red pepper, or whatever commodity all had agreed upon, and at the end of a month the ladies would pool all their resources together and hand over the whole quantity to one chosen by lot, the lots being cast taking care to see that each member had her own turn. Then the member who got it would sell it and take the money. The coins were kept in an 'undi' box, having a slit at the top into which the pieces could be slipped in, but could not be extricated without destroying the 'safe'. When a sufficient amount of money was made, it fetched them a new dress they had fancied, or even a trinket.

Though Helen was not a member of such an association, she still made money for her powders and laces and crimping pins by carefully storing the charcoal and the fine dust of rice called thavudu. The former, she could get sold to apakarchis or goldsmiths who needed charcoal for their trade, and the latter to anybody who had poultry. My mother, however, was a member of one of these clubs. There was a chit money fund also, where the members subscribed equal amounts and got lump sums by turns. But the person whose uncommon speculations deserve a special reference, was Mangalam, Anai's mother. Nothing could beat her craze for jewellery, for the sake of which she went on a course of rigidly economic diet, which was telling on her health and looks, but even at the cost of premature ageing, sunken hollow cheeks and lack

lustre eyes, she loved to display her jewels on her person, the ornaments looking as if they had been hung on a skeleton. Her husband gave her a holiday once in a way, and paid her fares to go to Pondicherry, her maiden home. Thither she secretly conveyed the contents of her 'undi' box, and got another jewel made, which she brought back wearing on her person, and telling her husband, she had got it as a present from her people. Her favourite remarks to her friends were: "Folks do not see what you eat; they only see what you wear," though in an extreme case like hers, none need have actually seen what she ate, when her face was an eloquent witness to it.

Some women, in their madness for economy, stooped down to any depths of meanness, so that when they could easily afford to buy the necessary condiments, they sent their children to their neighbours to ask for "A little salt", "A little coffee powder", and anything which the mother wanted gratis. In Madras, the chief nuisance we had to suffer was the numbers of requests for a little fire from our hearth. Morning and evening some mean people, who hesitated to spend a match and a little kerosene to make their own fires, would send a child with a piece of cow-dung cake to fetch some fire from our house.

CHAPTER XIII

MORE OF X-STREET. MANNADY

I was very inquisitive in those days, trying to see what the neighbours were doing and how they were living in their own houses. Our terrace, on the side of Mrs. Gershom's house, commanded not only their staircase, but also Mangalam's fireplace and the small hole of a bath-room. I was growing up an uneducated barbarian for all the indulgence shown to me by every one, and spent my idle time, amusing myself in watching and observing the sights and scenes all round, when I was not playing. It was great fun to me to catch poor Helen in her Cinderella's role when she was working. I liked to see Soosai, with pieces of rags instead of tailor-made garments for a dress, come half way up the staircase, with her bowl of rice discoloured in the centre by a little curry containing a few bits of meat and potato in sauce. Sitting on her favourite step, the girl used to enjoy a well-earned meal. Mangalam's culinary operations were all quite visible. There was a lot of sizzling and fizzling, when the curries were being seasoned and odours of vadagam, karuvepelai and other stuffs assaulted one's nose.

Sometimes I saw her frying slices of fish or mutton with a coating of chillie dust and salt; sometimes she made dhall paste, of course different things on different days. Now and then there would be exchanges of presents of curry between herself and mother, her speciality being green mango cooked in jaggery syrup and spices.

But the chief amusement of my idle hours was to watch the apakarchi's shop in the morning. Customers dropped in singly or in groups from six o'clock in the morning. Some climbed the pial, some stood under it, some stationed themselves astride of the gutter, all talking and some worrying the bakeress for prompt serving, the servants of bat-wallahs who behaved as if they themselves had all the privileges of their masters and mistresses, shouting: "My doraisany cannot wait;" "My Dorai is in a hurry to go out," and so on. These servants could speak English of some sort, which is classically known as 'butler' English. The women in our neighbourhood, who, even if they knew the three R's, were unacquainted with even the alphabet in English, had an extraordinary admiration for the ease with which butlers and chokras and ayahs spoke English, English that was mutilated, murdered, mispronounced and tortured in a thousand ways which the poor illiterates never knew. Once I heard a nurse expostulating with her charge, a fair little toddler, saying, "Sonny Boy, Ayah tell Mamma, Baby putting sand in frock." Rajathi, the senior of Anai's two sisters hearing it observed to me:

"Enna neirtiya, English peisura, par," (see, what beautiful English she speaks).

I wonder from whom I first heard the most notable example of Butler English, now familiar to every one. The story goes like this. The chef had to break the news of the thieving cat drinking away the milk kept for the master's tea, when it was left to cool down in the kitchen. This was the way, the trembling servant is said to have announced the calamity to the Sahib: "Saar, saar; four legs saar; two eyes saar; two ears and one nose, saar; one tail saar: miaou, miaou, saar; drink the milk saar."

Well, to go back to the bakery. There was one dear little Eurasian chap, so sweet and chubby, who after receiving his turn in the serving would take the oppers home licking the coating of cocoanut milk from the cakes all the way. There were some bullies also who came pretending to buy, but knocked off a few oppers from the basket tray where Soosai was piling them to be taken out for sale. One of these roughs was Dick, son of Mr. Pereira, the watch repairer, an overgrown boy of about twelve in his under-sized breeches and coat, wearing an evening cap, but no shoes or stockings. He was always snatching from children's hands whatever they may be holding. When he walked away with the oppers, Soosai ran after him, but she only got for her pains an angry outburst of: "Off, you go, you son of a bitch, or I'll break your bloody head." He suited his action to his word and the frightened girl came away weeping for the abuse and asked

me, what was meant by January Beach—that was her version of “Son of a bitch” and she actually said, Janavary for January.

Dick had once taken away Willie's kite, flinging abuse at the boy when he protested. Father went and had a quarrel with Pereira, who became so savage that the fellow was on the look-out for some weeks, to assault father with a big club, swearing he would murder the ‘native bugger’, so that we were even seriously thinking of leaving the locality ; for in a quarrel with these Eurasians, there was no fair play or justice. The whole community stood as one man, and any violence used was always extenuated on their side, but treated with political significance on the other side. Whatever the law of the land was, the actual result was usually this, and the man who hesitated to pitch himself against odds was not so much a coward, as the one who challenged him from a more or less secure position.

I have too long neglected our immediate neighbours to the left. They were a couple of Muslim brothers, Persian merchants with their families. Sticking to our staircase was the partition wall that ran between their house and ours. The men in the other house had erected a screen of high corrugated iron sheets over this partition wall, so that if we tried to see what they were doing in their own yard we could not. All the doors and windows of that three storied building were curtained on the sides where the ladies might be seen by strangers. And such lovely ladies they were. The Prophet Mohammed must

have had such in view, when he described the Houries in Paradise. Beautiful fair faces, graceful forms and movements, flowing and rustling silk draperies with embroidery and trimmings of gold thread, tinkling jewels, they might have just stepped out of the Arabian Nights. The men usually wore white dresses at home, loose drawers, long shirts, skull caps, with only their richly embroidered waistcoats and turned up shoes in colours. The boys were a smaller edition of the men, only they wore tall caps with gold and silver work on them. If the purdah girls dressed like the grown up women, the small ones who still moved about freely and played in the street wore silk pyjamas with the usual braids and gold work, and waistcoats over silk shirts like their brothers and sometimes caps too, but these Houries in the making shone in many colours unlike the boys, their long hair falling in a plait at the back, and quite often over their boyish clothes, they wore beautiful silk mantles draping their shoulders, and enhancing the loveliness of the girls, as they pattered about in their pretty slippers.

The men liked our family very much, for father had practically given up going upstairs except to sleep, in order not to be a hindrance to their ladies when the latter came out to take the air on their terrace; and if he went up at all, hung down his head and looked neither to the right nor to the left. Some of the Eurasian children and we used to go to their house and admire the ornaments there, for if not pictures which were

absent there were beautiful shells, huge fans, dolls' houses and curious kinds of drapery and richly upholstered furniture. They gave us figs, dates, candy and if nothing nice was handy, treated us to lots of granulated sugar. Our Muslim neighbours must have spent a little fortune every year on fireworks. During the Deepavali season, they sent us packets of crackers, large size and the dwarf size, in many colours. We too bought several of the things with our pocket money. There were boxes of matches with coloured tips exceedingly attractive with various tints and called, 'pada, pada Kuchchi' (crackling matches) because they crackled when we struck them. There were other boxes containing matches with a blue tip, or red tip, which when lit produced a red or blue flame. Others yet burst into a shower of sparks. Then there were the geysers which shot upward from an earthen tube and the rockets and detonators. We also used to buy something like clay pellets, from which snakes would wriggle out when burnt. My favourite things were the Japanese flowers, minute things looking like a splint from a match stick but when dropped into water unfolding themselves with many a jerk into a tiny spray of flowers, a bird or a fish. Oh, those childhood days! and yet, I would not call them back even if I could.

During the Id festival, or when there was a function, our neighbours sent us the nice things they had cooked. One invariably expected the samia or dough strings cooked in milk and flavoured with sugar and garnished with almonds, cocoanut

parings and currents and what else I do not know. There was pulav, rice and meat cooked together in ghee with a number of spices and ingredients including rose water to give it a perfume. There were some kinds of cakes and the inevitable pan with finely pared nut and nutmeg, cocoanut scrapings and spices. Though my mother had entered an 'Untouchable' family, still, she abhorred food cooked by Mohammedans, but she allowed us to eat the nice things.

In the house directly opposite to ours lived a number of Christian families, both Roman Catholic and Protestant. There was a lady confectioner here also, but she looked more refined than Anthonyamma, the apakarchi, in that she had some jewels, the most prominent among them being the green glass ear pendants; wore her saree more neatly and had a short bodice for her bosom. The nature of her confections was likewise different. She prepared many kinds of steamed things, all with rice flour. Her bakery was indoors and only a few customers came to the shop whereas directly the cakes were finished, she would set out with them in a tray on her head to vend them in the streets. Her chief wares were olay apam, sweet dumplings, rice puffs stuffed with some sweet material inside, maleeda and some other things.

Another, was an overseer's family. Mr. Masilamony was a black man, but his wife was fair. She was slim and dressed very neatly having refined jewels of the Pondicherry pattern. Ranjitham, the daughter and only child, fortunately

resembled her mother. Mrs. Masilamony's mother, handsome even in advanced middle age, resided with her daughter, and they all seemed to be a happy family. Mr. Masilamony seemed to have a very grand idea about his own position, for when nobody else had a name-board round about, in lieu of a wooden board or a brass plate, this man had got his name and designation painted with a tar brush on the bare wall of the street front. He seemed to be fond of music, for almost every evening he played on his violin while his pretty daughter sang in accompaniment. The parents and grandmother made much of Ranjitham and liked to dress her up in different kinds of costumes. Though her hair was combed back smoothly, from the forehead and braided behind, her natural good looks did not suffer and she was very pretty with her delicate chains and bangles and anklets. When she went to school, however, she took off her jewels, wore frocks and ribbons and sashes, with shoes and stockings, going in a riksha and looking like an Eurasian girl. Mr. Masilamony's family were Protestants, but for the sake of a good English education they sent her to the Presentation Convent. At home, Ranjitham wore skirts and jackets usually, but often went in for thavannies and sarees also, in all which she looked equally charming.

In the same house there was another family of good looking people. These were Roman Catholics and consisted of the father, whose image by no amount of ransacking my memory, can I conjure up, the mother, a slim and pretty

lady, and some sons and daughters all fair. The only members whose figures and looks are clearly traced before me even today were Ammanni, the eldest girl about my own age, and her younger sister Roja. Like the Masilamonys they were all refined and dressed neatly. Ammanni, delicate and handsome, in spite of a pock-pitted face, used to look sad sometimes. It might have been mental depression, or simply absent-mindedness, but I do not think it was due to the fact that she had lost her own mother and now had only a step-mother, for her father's second wife being her late mother's own sister, none could have guessed from the treatment she received, that Ammanni was motherless. Roja was much fairer, and though she was a pretty girl too, she lacked her sister's beauty, which seemed to stir one's very soul as it were. The two were step-sisters, but unless one heard the history it was impossible to guess that the brothers and sisters were not all children of the same mother.

Then there was the house with the hibiscus growing from the pavement of the street verandah and the bougainvillea covered arch in front. Here lived a black family called the Jeffersons. There was a talk that they were not Eurasians, but only Christians turning dorais, and that Mr. Jefferson's elder brother living in some other part of Madras, had a wife who never went in for gowns, but was dressed in the stylish Madras fashion, high heeled shoes and stockings, and saree with gathers and a train behind. However that may be, Mrs. Jefferson

Junior was in a sort of night gown the whole day long, wearing bed-room slippers and her hair in paper curls, till after four o'clock she came out in a gown of black or dark coloured tweed or serge, a muslin plain or printed blouse, shoes and stockings on her feet and a fan in her hand.

Our friends, the Gershoms, left their old rooms and shifted into new quarters at the far end of the same street, but in as much as the acquaintance was not allowed to die out, we continued exchanging visits. Now that the Dewan's calls were increasing in frequency, and I could not always take Willie to the shops, we were glad to spend the time at the Gershoms'. On the way there was a house, where some dorais lived, and between the daughter of the house and me an acquaintance sprang up. Maggie and I had first met at the Salvation Army Headquarters, whence both she and I among a crowd of other spectators had watched the Mohurram processions one day. They kept a fierce dog, which ran barking at the heels of all the pedestrians and used to frighten me very much. But in spite of my trying to dodge the dog and proceed on my way, passing the house unnoticed, Maggie would manage to see me and drag me to her house. Why I wanted to avoid her was the discomfort I used to feel, because she would ask me to speak in undertones and make my escape if her mother happened to be heard coming. We used to sit on the pial therefore, the easier for me to

slip out when necessary, and conversed in low whispers, as she was mortally afraid of her mother. Maggie was darker than I perhaps, taking after her father, whom I had never seen, but not the least bit resembling the mother who was like a Quadroon woman. Her brother Frank too was a fair boy, though he only had the Indian complexion which poor Maggie herself was denied. Whenever Maggie was sent out on errands, she never failed to call on me and play with me as long as she could, keeping the job waiting, and often making me anxious about her bones, as she loved to sit astride the parapet wall upstairs as if riding on horseback, or she would try to cross over to the other terrace, where the staircase being just out of reach of her legs made a precarious landing. Apart from all this, my mother fiercely resented my friends calling at the house in the evenings, as interfering with her own business. Once when Mrs. Gershom's sister, Lily, came to see me, much as my mother loved me, she gave me such a thrashing after the girl had left, that I have not forgotten it to this day. But poor mother, I forgive her all that, and only entreat other mothers to think of the irreparable wrongs they inflict on the children when they choose to depart from the path of womanly virtue.

To go back to Maggie, during one of my visits to her, as we usually sat on the stone sofa of the pial, I asked her to sing something which I wanted to hear. Maggie was afraid of her mother, but she risked the danger to please me and started singing in low tones. Just then her mother, in a

long wrapper, entered the hall from an adjacent room with the baby in her arms to put it in the cradle. Maggie gave a tap to my head and asked me to bend down, but the enemy had already seen me through the window. She deposited the baby in the cradle and striding out, waved her forefinger to me to clear out. I did not need the order so much as I was already sprinting with Willie. I heard her scolding her daughter for her incorrigible inclination to associate with niggers. Poor Maggie, I thought she could not help it, for she must have had plenty of 'nigger' blood in her veins to look so dark. She herself often came to me and I used to share my sweetmeats with her. She also had a craving for samples of the dishes we cooked, and almost invariably her first question on meeting me would be : "What curry?" Once, when Emmie and Mary had come home, mother cooked a chicken, and I told her that. "You don't say you had fowl for breakfast!" she exclaimed, as if such a thing could not be believed, and then suddenly seizing my right hand she took it to her nose to smell and see that I was not imposing.

I suppose, you remember, Arokiamma, wife of the murdered butler, Mr. Perinayagam? It was some years by now, that we on account of our constant shiftings, went out of touch with that family. One morning this lady found out our house after a long search and disclosed her business. I suppose, near where they lived in the neighbourhood of one of our former residences, there was a Roman Catholic Eurasian

family, the Taylors, whom my mother remembered well. One of the sons in railway service had, it would appear, fallen violently in love with Lurdhu Mari, the charming second daughter of Mr. Perinayagam, and was bent upon marrying her in teeth of a fierce gale of opposition from the entire family and despite threats of being cut off from his kith and kin. The young man's infatuation being incurable, the parents left him to his fate, relaxing their severity however to the extent of opening the doors to Nicholas, only if and when his bride wore gowns and became a doraisany and kept her native origin a secret.

Lurdhu Mari was to be married in a saree only, but in the refined and stylish manner of well-educated girls, and Mr. Nicholas Taylor himself did not object to the native costume, so long as he could realize his object.

"But she stubbornly refuses to wear the veil and gloves, Amma," her mother was complaining to my mother, "can't she manage to have them on during that brief ceremony at least? So, so very shy the girl is. She does not want to wear shoes and stockings and she does not want to wear a stylish saree, but how can that be?"

Emmie said: "When she is going to marry a dorai, she has got to wear them all." Mother detained Arokiamma for dinner, in order to hear more of the romance that had led to the impending inter-communal marriage.

The chief object of Arokiamma's visit that morning was to borrow some of mother's jewels

for the wedding, the old and time-honoured custom of women having scanty jewels or none, to shine in borrowed plumes. Some weeks after this visit took place, I saw a fine young lady in a blue satin saree, Parsi fashion, a long sleeved blouse that conformed to the curves of her arms and on her head a cap, the strap of which passed under her chin, wearing stockings and high-heeled shoes making for our door accompanied by a young dorai, whose look did not impress me much as he was dark and had prominent teeth. The lady shyly greeted my mother and sisters and could not be easily persuaded to take a seat, since there were only two chairs which were offered to the visitors and my mother had no seat for herself, even if the children did not matter. "I am not worthy to sit in a chair before you," she remarked repeatedly, with great difficulty being persuaded to sit while my mother and sisters took mats and low stools for their seats, and I was in hiding all the time. This fine but modest young lady was Lurdhu Mari, Arokiamma's daughter, and now, Mrs. Taylor. I should never have recognised her without being told, since I only remembered her as being beautiful without having an idea of her features. They stayed for a brief while and could not even wait for tea, that was being got ready. They were leaving Madras, and as Mr. Taylor could not possibly go away without paying his respects to the friends who were so nice to his wife's family, he had brought her to say good-bye to us. After they left, we were all drowned in an ocean

of discussion. Exclamations of surprise from mother and Emmie as to the perfection with which such a stylish costume had fitted Lurdhu Mari, as if she had been used to it all her life, and then admiration for her increased loveliness and her natural dignity in her new position and such topics.

"Whoever will think she is Arokiamma's daughter?" exclaimed Emmie.

But her father was a fair and good looking man, you know," my mother answered.

"Even then," put in Mary, "I wonder what has become of Jenny!"

Jenny was Lurdhu Mari's eldest sister, who had been employed as maid in some European family and had been spoilt by a son of that house. She had been disowned by her parents, and nobody knew what had become of her, though there were vague rumours that her seducer had taken a cottage for her and visited her occasionally even after he had married an English wife.

There was none to say a nice word for poor Mr. Taylor. We all agreed in pronouncing him an ugly man and had much merriment at his expense, but after her own fit of laughter was over, my mother philosophically observed:

"What does it matter if his exterior is uncouth? He has a heart of gold. All through his conversation, he was talking of God and how good He is to those who trust in Him. And

the man adores the girl. What more does she want? She is very lucky. But Meena, you horrid girl, you are the proudest prig I have ever seen. Do you think that you are such a paragon of beauty to hide yourself like that and not come out when she was asking to see you so much and we all called you to come, hiding in that room all the time without even answering?"

Dear me, it was true I thought too much about my own looks, not thinking I was only considered a beauty in comparison with the plainer looks of the other members, and my mother herself was not a little responsible for making this false idea take such a deep root in me, and yet on that day, it was not vanity, so much as extreme shyness,—my worst failing after selfishness—that kept me hiding indoors. I have recorded in memory the instances when other people have unjustly misunderstood me, but I have no means of knowing how often I have cruelly misunderstood others. If some one else wrote a story with me as one of the principal characters, I might, perhaps, figure as an atrocious monster of selfishness and blind to my own moral defects. Mary interrupted my gloomy reflections with a well known rhyme:

Once I was a thanni karchi (water woman)
Working under the butleru (butler)
Now I am a doraisany
Riding in a coach vandi,
Yaar Amma vandi lai (who's in the carriage)
Roja poovu kondilai (with a rose in her hair)
Brandy bottle kayi lai (brandy bottle in hand)
Whiskey bottle vaithilai (whiskey bottle inside of her).

"Poor thing, she neither came in a gown or riding in a coach vandi," remarked my mother, but Mary, incorrigible Mary, retorted, "but he is only an otay kappal dorai", which means he is one who arrived in a rickety ship and therefore not a real white man.

CHAPTER XIV

SCHOOL DAYS IN MADRAS

I was by now a veritable savage, without the learning and accomplishments of girls in educated families. My acquisitions were purely the result of private reading, which was mainly desultory, and from what I picked up from the studies of my sisters and brothers. Sophie had to discontinue her schooling because of ill-health and some eye trouble that she was developing, and she spent as much of her time at Sunderkote as at Madras. Even Willie had been put to school, when my parents realized how they were neglecting my true interest by over-indulgence. When I was a little tot, I had attended an elementary school for a week or two, I believe, but owing to the brutal thrashing I received there on one occasion I was stopped.

There was, or perhaps, there still exists, in Broadway, with its back gate in Jones Street, an institution going under the appellation of The Indian Christian Girls' School. I suppose it was a middle school attached to the Christian College or Northwick School. I was admitted here. In the lower classes boys also were reading, and adjoining this building there was an upstairs one, which

was the European section of the school. The latter was a stone building with some of its windows overlooking our playground, and I faintly remember a section of our compound projecting like a recess for about two yards behind the other building, which might have had one or two doors opening into it; for though I do not recollect any entrance there, I remember the European children coming into the lane now and then; of course by 'European' I mean all the types previously mentioned.

I behaved like the wildest barbarian at the commencement of my school career, giving not a little occasion for others to titter and laugh at my eccentric conduct. If I had been a small child, my strange behaviour in the novel atmosphere of a school might have been natural, but I was by now too old for such childish nervousness or curiosity to look anything but ridiculous. I was taken into the third class, but personally I attached myself to no class. As the whole school was situated in one large hall, with my satchel on my arm, I would go, inspecting class after class, and run every now and then like a madcap to the main entrance, whenever a tram car passed by, to stare at it as if that was the first time I was setting my eyes on one. In those days there used to be a sort of maidan opposite to the school, where now and then the kites were fed with strips of meat by men and boys who would call for the birds with cries of what sounded like, "ah. . . . ah. . . . ah. . . . ah," as they tossed the bits of meat for them. As

the great birds swooped down and without a pause swept back in a circle catching the flying bits in their talons, I used to enjoy the sight immensely. The kite is supposed to be the mount of the God Krishna, and pious Hindus feed it everywhere periodically.

In time, I was sufficiently tamed to settle down to work. Our class consisted of only one form back of the second class, and we were only three pupils, the other two being Sam and Sampooranam. The two classes were in charge of the same teacher, a Miss or Mrs. Vedavalli. I do not remember what lessons she taught us, but I remember watching the girls and boys of the second class during kindergarten work. I likewise remember that our teacher was always telling us stories, many of them being her own dreams to which she attached the utmost importance as if they had been visions. In one of these she seems to have seen Christ, and she told this dream as if she had actually seen Christ with her own physical eyes.

I have worshipped beauty all my life, and have often been in my absent-mindedness, foolish enough to express my preference in company, without the least idea that my plain looking friends would feel hurt. Sitting on the third class bench, I would spend most of my time watching two lovely sisters in the second class. They were Akkamma and Thungamma, with sweet faces and dressed in pretty frocks and shoes and stockings, and wearing velvet caps on their heads. They had delicate ear-rings and a

single stone set button on one side of the nose, but these in such pretty girls were far from being out of keeping with their European costume. They had a little sister Janaki in the Infant class, a cherub, with her black curly hair, falling like a shower from underneath her cap. This child had no ear or nose jewels like her sisters. They usually came to school and returned home walking accompanied by a servant and carrying their own satchels, but when it rained they used to come in their carriage. Their lunch was brought at one o'clock, and Akkama served the food. She sat on a bench in her own class and unpacked the food which was kept in one plate and covered with another. She served Thungamma's portion in the covering plate, and as the second girl sat on a separate bench to eat, Akkamma and Janaki sat on the same bench facing each other and ate from the same plate between them. These sisters were Canarese people and Hindu girls, though I do not know their caste. I think there were more Hindu girls, including Brahmins, than Christian girls in the school, and there was a rule that the older girls were not to be addressed by their names, but called Akka—elder sister—by the juniors.

There were a good many boys in the lower classes. In our own class there was Sam, a plumpy boy, ugly with a great scar under his eye and his face as I compared in those godless days like a pug's. His drawers of chintz had flounces at the waist and drawn tight at the ankles. Like other Madrased boys, when they were in full

dress, Sam carried a cloth purse, tucked in at the waist. He had a felt cap much too large for his head. All three of us found our favourite postures, when we sat with our legs against the second class bench in front of us and tilting our own backwards. Sampoornam was an orphan girl, who stayed with her married sister in, I believe, Malayappan Street. This girl would now and then talk about her mother in the class. We all did our talking in the class in spite of warnings and punishments from the second class teacher; may be because we were left to ourselves so much without lessons. Once Sampoornam told us that when her mother was breathing her last, the older folks took herself and her small brothers and sisters and locked them in a room to prevent them from seeing death. In my unpardonable curiosity I asked her the heartless question: "Did you cry when she died?" Her stinging answer was: "Ungo amma seththita, nee ala mattai?" (Won't you cry if your mother dies?)

There was another motherless girl in the school, called Edith Peters, of the Shanar caste, but Christian now. She always wore very old and dirty frocks. One rainy day she had played in the open and got her dress wet. When the one o'clock bell went, she did not go home as usual for her meals, but stood against a wall holding her frock spread out to dry. I asked her why she should not go home and change, and she answered with tears in her eyes: "Amma thittu vango," (mother will scold) meaning of

course her step-mother, who perhaps never cared, if the girl missed her dinner by not coming home. Of all the unfortunates in this unfortunate world, I feel that the saddest are motherless little children.

Once Sampooram, in considerable excitement announced to me: "Ungo akka vandichi," (your elder sister has come). I was puzzled and asked: "Endakka?" (which elder sister), for I had three of them. The naughty girl giggling at her own joke answered: "Vendakka" (ladies' fingers). The humour was in the rhyme between endakka and vendakka and nothing more. Then she continued her pranks and said: "Ungo annai vandichi," (your elder brother is come), and as I was silent being determined not to be imposed upon for a second time, she told me to ask, which brother, and I did. Then she came out with another rhyme, "Velakennai" (castor oil). Now Sam came forward with some of his riddles and writing the following words on his slate asked me to read them. He had put down: "Inda muttai unakku, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma?" I read it exactly as it was written and the other two laughed at my stupidity. Then Sam answered his own riddle and read his writing like this: "Inda muttai unakku pathu ma?" (is the sweetmeat enough for you). Instead of repeating 'ma' ten times he had read 'ten ma'. One thing to be borne in mind throughout my account is that the quotations from Tamil given everywhere come from slang, so that Brahmans and high class people who talk Tamil

in a different way may not even understand some of the words. After his first riddle, Sam asked me to solve another so very similar to the first that I could do it quite easily. This time the words were: "Inda maadam unakku ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma, ma"; I read it as "Inda maadam unakku ettu ma;" (can you reach this mantle piece), that is 'eight ma' instead of repeating 'ma' eight times. They gave me an ovation for my supposed cleverness this time.

Every morning before sessions began, we sang a hymn in the assembly and had prayers and at breaking up time in the evening also we had a hymn though I have forgotten whether we had prayers too. Our teachers were very particular regarding the closing of eyes during prayers. One morning, after going to the class from the assembly, self-righteous prig that I was, I reported against Pushpam, a second class girl, who had not closed her eyes at all. "How did you find out that?" the teacher asked me and I was nonplussed, and if Pushpam had a licking I had my due share of it, though neither of us got it very hot. Thus quite early in life, I had started the business of searching for the mote in another person's eye, hiding a whole beam in my own.

I remember some more faces and names but not much. There were two Canarese Brahmin sisters, one in sarees—in those days girls wore sarees even at nine—and another

still in skirts and jackets. The chief characteristic for which they were remembered—though not in my class—was, they had a pink flush on the softest yellow coloured complexion, but they were not my type of beauty as they dressed in the orthodox style and with tightly plaited hair. They had a brother Shanker Rao in full European dress, but wearing as if for a mockery the ugliest rat's tail, growing from the apex of his head with a clearing all round and falling to his knees behind.

What books were read and what lessons were done are not at all clear to me now. Beyond my favourite lesson, I remember nothing in the Tamil Reader, but the three 'Manackers' (scholars), who were so much hackneyed about that my mother often wished them in the warmest region of the next world. Then there was a book entitled 'Geography', in which the only remembered lesson was a catechism about a horse, which began with, "Mailai kati irupadu enna?" (what do you see in the above picture), was the question, the picture being that of a horse. The answer was: "Kudirai" (a horse). I remember nothing more in the catechism. But I was a very bad scholar and always neglected my home work, except for the attention I paid to the three Manackers, who, of course, were the dull, the forgetful and the industrious. Not all the terrors inspired by Kannamma, the teacher, who took geography and some other subjects, had the power of putting more application into me. I had grown up with such hopeless want of discipline.

What I did enjoy most in my school life here was the games we used to play. The most popular ones were:

One duke's ariding, ariding, ariding
One duke's ariding, my tipsy topsy officer.
Of course we said: 'Juke's for Duke's. Then there was,
Poor Jenny she's weeping, she's weeping, she's weeping
Poor Jenny she's weeping, on a bright and summer's day.

The rest were: "Sally Sally water;" "Draw a bucket of water;" "Circle round the moon;" and "Oranges lemon."

Sometimes in the morning recess we used to go to Broadway to quench our thirst, real or imaginary, at a water tap there. There were a sister and brother in our school who had a married sister at Broadway. They used to come with us in order to give her a flying visit. Under the masonry work where the tap was situated, flowed the large black sewer, which was a horror to me, as I used to imagine unfathomable depths and fearful drowning. The border round the area of the tap had two outlets overhanging the gutter on either side, to drain off the waste water from the pipe. While the black flow of the drain had an unspeakable horror for me, Akkamma with her back to it, stood on the ridge with the canal between her feet, and bending her graceful figure to drink from the hand which she held to the running spout took her draughts. What a pretty girl she was! And Janaki too. Thungamma had a different type of face and was not so handsome as her sisters. Janaki would not leave the school after break up, till her older sisters after coming

out by the back gate, put their heads through the doorway, one leg on the threshold and summoned her many times, when the little figure in her white frock, black shoes and stockings and black curls escaping from her cap, came pattering with her satchel, laughing all the time.

In those days, I used to make myself ridiculous owing to extreme abstraction of mind, which is simply inexplicable. Often when the school adjourned for lunch, I used to think it was four o'clock, and would be puzzled as to why we were allowed to go away without the usual assembly or the hymn singing. When I asked Sampooranam for an explanation, she used to look bewildered at my question and would reply: "We do not have singing now." More than once, going home, I have run to the water tap to bathe my face and legs and hands, and commencing to change my dress have called for coffee, when mother would ask: "Are you not going to school again? I have served you rice. Come and eat it. This is not the time for coffee." Throughout my life, I have occasionally suffered from sudden but fortunately very brief lapses of memory, so that never at any time could I account for certain things which I was expected to know, and more than once I have denied what I had done without the ghost of an idea that I was telling a falsehood.

The pupils, many Hindus included, attended the same Sunday School, I think at the Wesleyan Church in Broadway. Some girls who came to

school bare-footed, in skirts and jackets, wore frocks and shoes and stockings to Sunday School. What was taught here remains a clean blank in my memory, but I do not think Sunday School had much influence on our conduct; for we were just the same whether we heard good exhortation or not. Indeed, an incident which happened on one of the Sundays, serves to show to what extent we allowed the lessons we learnt there, to determine our conduct in daily life. A plantain tree in the garden had been newly felled leaving only a stump in its place. Harry had one day come with me in full dress wearing boots, and he placed his foot on the stump. I suppose that among the many superstitions of the Hindus, Harry's action was reprehensible; for, Krishna, one of the school girls, asked me to tell Harry to take off his foot at once. I challenged her right to give me orders, in the premises of a place which did not belong to either of us. This was the prelude to a long drawn strife between the two of us, thenceforward. Arguments and threats ensued; there were partisans on both sides, but as my eloquence had a treacherous way of deserting me whenever my temper was up, I could not cope with Krishna in arguments, and went and reported the state of affairs at home. This abruptly ended my school career once more.

It would not be out of place to record my impressions of the European section of the school. There seemed to have been boarders as well as day scholars here. They were boys and girls in all stages and degrees of dress according to their

means. The straw hats and the palm leaf plaited slippers of the very poor scholars who wore no stockings are keenly remembered, because in those days one of my ambitions was to make such articles, just as I used to dream of making tapestry, lace and ever so many things which I never had the patience to learn. Now and then some of these children came into our playground. But the one thing that has cut itself deep in my memory with regard to this section was the cruelty of the boys. For one Davy among Indians—I do not think I am exaggerating—there seemed to be ten among the Eurasians, who revelled in inflicting tortures on poor harmless creatures. In some seasons the dragon-flies came in swarms, circled or darted overhead, and settled on walls and doors and plants. There were the rather plain looking large ones and the gorgeously coloured small ones. Catching the dragon-flies was a great pastime with us all. But the atrocities of the Eurasian boys were such that when they caught a dragon-fly, they thrust a broom stick into its tail and set it free again to watch its agonies, as the poor insect flew madly hither and thither. If it clung to a wall they would disturb it again in order to irritate the wound.

The cattle in Jones' Street were a terror to me, as they came to be milked at the time we returned from school in the evenings. I think Madras cows do not hesitate to remind us of their horns, but my fright was simply abnormal, and when a party of us had to make our way

through one of these herds, I verily believed that every bovine eye was fixed menacingly on me alone. Escaping from the herd was always a crisis in my life.

Before I close the account of my three months' experience in the Indian Christian Girls' School, I must mention one more incident. There was a wedding in Jones' Street almost opposite to our back gate, and it was here I saw Western dancing for the first time in my life. They were dorais. The street verandah was full of palms. As the flight of steps was at one end of the verandah, some of us stole in by twos and threes, as the music attracted us and we heard there was dancing. I had no time to see much; for as soon as I understood my presence had been noticed, I sprinted from the place. A carpet, not very broad either, was laid on the floor in the centre of the hall and four couples paced on it to the strains of an organ. I am not an authority on dancing, and I am very old-fashioned in my views; so it gave me a bad shock to see a man and a woman go arm in arm bouncing from corner to corner of the carpet, but this was nothing to the modern trots or waltzes, where the couples make some kind of people shudder to see them. Janaki had come with me and as she could not make her escape as light footedly as I, she was caught. A lady came out and seeing the pretty child near the palms, stroked her cheeks and hair and asked her for her name. Janaki gave a seraphic smile and came pattering away.

CHAPTER XV

BACK TO BARBARISI

ONCE more I lapsed into an idle life. There was no company whatever at home for me. The brothers had long since taken up an attitude that it was unmanly to associate with their sisters in games or studies. This superiority complex gave me no small provocation. Father and mother could be no company for a girl on the eve of becoming a woman. As it was, father had his private tuitions which kept him away from home the whole of the livelong day, and mother had her own company, when I was not even allowed to stay at home but sent on visits to my friends. If I detested anything in my life at this time, it was her tireless singing of her lover's praises. My chief friend at this time was Ammani, the nice girl in the opposite house whose step-mother was her own aunt. This girl seems to have discontinued her studies and was available to play with me whenever we were free from helping our mothers. The most popular game with us, as with all the other girls and young women then, was 'Sungu', played with tamarind beans. We could play with any quantity of them, and when there were a number of

players we had more than a bushel of these seeds between the two teams. The player who began a round, took a handful from the common heap and tossed it up and received as much of it as was convenient to her, on the back of her hand, the rest falling down. Then she had to toss up again, what she had on the back of her hand and receive the whole lot into the hollow of her upturned palm without scattering a single bean. This required some dexterity and a great deal of practice as well as patience, the last mentioned being a thing unknown to me. If she let a seed or more drop down, she lost her chance. If not, she could arrange her spoils in groups of four. Four beans made the lowest unit. If there were two fours, they could be combined into a larger unit. Then, as soon as there were eight of these larger units, they could be combined into the highest unit. This is the way a player's acquisitions had to be arranged. This was how the game was continued. Only if there were more than four seeds in the hand, they could be taken in fours or eights, and the game continued with the balance, whatever that may be under four. If there were only four, they could not be taken since they were needed for the tossing. The seeds in the hand, four or less had to be tossed up and before they came down the player had to pick up one or more according to her ability from the heap on the floor and catch the descending seed or seeds in mid air. Whether she disturbed any other seed in the common heap while she extricated what she wanted, or

missed any of the descending ones she had to pass the game on to the opponent. Otherwise, till she lost her game she could go on accumulating her prize in multiples of four. Just before the game started however, the central heap was scattered fairly well to enable the players to pick up individual or small groups of seeds without undue difficulty. If the central heap was too bulky to be all scattered at one time, the loose beans were to be found at the margins, more and more taken out from the pile in this way till the whole melted away. When there was nothing more left to be taken, all the players contributed to the common heap again, in exactly the same quantity, so that the size of each contribution depended on the quantity available with the player with the smallest acquisition. The rounds continued till one side had lost everything and could not contribute even the least unit of four. The other side then was the winner.

This was Sungu, of which I do not remember all the rules now. It was really admirable, the dexterity with which the practised and cool-headed players tossed up quantities of seeds, and picked up single ones or small groups, or made a more substantial haul, and at the same time caught the descending seeds, without disturbing other beans on the floor, without slipping any from their own hands and without missing what they had tossed up. There were of course fouls now and then, and consequently protests even leading to quarrels, but on the whole, Sungu was like some clever legerdemaine. It was a most rhythmic

game as well, for the players got the utmost enjoyment out of it, when they sang as they played, ballads and snatches, like—

Chinnannai pondati,
Sirki sandai potalam.

(The wife of the junior elder brother
Is said to have picked up a quarrel.)

These are the only two blessed lines that are still lodged somewhere in the recesses of my memory.

Another game we played with tamarind beans, or dak flower beans, was the 'pallan kurivi'. The board could be folded up and put away like a case when it was not in use. It was usually made of wood and shaped like a fish with two rows of round pits lying parallel. The player started dropping the beans one into each pit in order on both the sides and continued the rounds till the supply of beans was exhausted. Then she cleared the contents of the pit, lying next to the one into which she had dropped her last bean and started dropping again from the next. Every time the supply was exhausted the next was taken from the pit next to that in which the last seed was dropped. In this process, sometimes the player came upon a group of four when she could take that as her prize. Also, sometimes, after dropping the last bean in the hand into one pit, she found the next one empty, its contents having been taken out for distribution before. Under such circumstances, the player 'licked' the pit—swept it with her hand—and seized the contents of its next neighbour on the

other side. How one party scored and another lost in pallan kurivi, I do not at all remember now.

In the evenings, we girls and boys of the neighbourhood, who could afford to have some recreation, turned the street into a playground, despite the traffic, and used the pials and steps, of houses for our games of hide and seek, catch-me-if-you-can, and others. The most popular running game was 'jute', 'ambal'. Jute was the signal given that we were ready to be hunted, and ambal stood for a truce. Of course, ambal had to be said in time before the enemy touched you. Sometimes we fixed upon a particular place, a wall or a portion of the pial or anything as sanctuary, so that in case a fugitive was too tired to continue dodging the pursuer, if he could make for this neutral area in time and touched the place before being caught then he had the right to play again. The pursuer or hunter was called the thief and he or she was first chosen by a kind of lot, but later on the very first fugitive who was caught became the thief and the first thief joined the party of the hunted. The lot was exercised by the recitation of some rhyme—I remember only three of the several we had in use—and the one who recited the rhyme passed her or his hand over all the players gathered there for the election of the thief. Till the rhyme ended the hand went more than one round touching each player in turn and in order. Then, either the one on whom the hand was passed for the last time

or the next one—I am not sure which—was the thief, who as soon as the signal ‘jute’ was given started running to catch some one quickly. I shall give here the most popular rhymes in their most popular version, not troubling myself to give the correct rendering. One was :

Onary, twoary, tickery, ten
Hobson Jobson Englishmen,
In ping, plum, pudding, sting.

Another one :

Obni Bobni bent 'e bow,
Shot the pigeon and killed the crow;
Crow is black ; pigeon is white,
Obni, Bobni bent 'e bow.

Then something, whether in the language of men or angels or of devils I cannot understand to this day. The rhyme ran like this:

Udumbu, thadumbu, mackan, chuckan, pal, parangi,
lot may, cheet may, chee, chal.

With our screams and stampedes, our furious charge upon pials and window sills, we must have made ourselves a hellish nuisance to our neighbours but we never thought of that.

By this time, the scandal at home had reached a point where it could not be ignored any longer. The foul fiend, whom my mother adored and worshipped, as the ‘great’ man, sometimes would stroke my cheeks and ask me, whether I would go away with him and be his adopted child. A leper’s hand I felt, might have been more welcome on my cheek than this filthy wretch’s, and I would have sooner consented to be Satan’s adopted daughter in hell than to

have this beast for my foster father. To hear my mother dwell upon his virtues and what compliments he paid to her, was sickening beyond utterance. I was punished, if my friends chose to call on me in the afternoons instead of in the mornings, and if I could not bring myself to be so rude as to tell them to go away, as she wanted me to tell, she herself would meet them and ask them to come some other time. The neighbours all knew what was going on, and they would watch the house, from the moment the villain stepped in and I stepped out. As I was a child, and was not likely to concoct presentable versions, the women of the surrounding houses would beckon to me and while pretending to make much of me with caresses, ask me such questions as filled me with shame. My sisters and brothers already knew that everything was going wrong in the house, but we were afraid, what father might do, if he came to know of it. My mother had not a shred of shame left now, but she would pounce like a tigress bereft of her cubs, on any one who dared to tell her, her conduct was reprehensible. Where her love for her children vanished, I do not know; for if one of us took her to task or advised her to discourage the guilty lover's stealthy visits, she would strike the girls brutally with anything that came to her hands and threatened the boys that she would leave us all to our fate and fly with her 'friend'. Davy could not control his anger, and once told her plainly that he would order the man not to step into the house again, but she had one answer to

give, that she who cared neither for God nor for man, was not to be deterred by a mere boy and that she would go and live with him openly.

When the mother's conduct was so void of godliness and chastity, could her conversation be holy? The love of gossip, chiefly to hear and tell of other people's frailties and wrong doings concocting rumours, exaggerating reports, these went on multiplying day by day. After the midday meal was over, there was usually a gathering of the gossips in some one's house, or conversations were held over parapet walls, upstairs or on the street pials, the most interesting discussions taking place when they were all seated on mats in some house with the spittoon in the centre of the club for the members to spit as they enjoyed chewing pan.

At odd times, the ayahs and servants of other houses were accosted on their way to or from market usually, and they related scandals about this mistress or that master or of the young people in some other family. The accounts were eagerly listened to and unholy remarks passed. Unfortunately, having no better occupation in those idle days, I found myself taking a wicked delight in overhearing these scandals.

I remember one ayah narrating the story of her dora's infidelity, how she gave her husband, Mr. Vanhaughten plain fare, and got puddings and rich dishes ready for her paramour Mr. De Cruz, and how one day, when the husband surprised the guilty pair by returning

home earlier than his wont, Mrs. Vanhaughten hid her guilty lover behind a cupboard and escaped being caught. All my knowledge of Arokiamma's eldest daughter, Jenny, was culled in this way, for I have just no more than the ghost of a passing recollection of her myself. What necessity was there to publish Jenny's story wherever mother went, and to people who never knew her nor were likely to know her at all? She had quite a number of impious stories to tell and also what she gathered from one, she would pass to the next. Jenny had been spoilt by Francis, the eldest son of Mr. Clay, and was living in a cottage after being disowned by her parents, and every year brought forth white bairns who were more like her charges than her own offspring. The numerous examples of goodness and chastity did not come up for discussion, for anything sweet or noble had no attraction for them.

As for servants, perhaps, there is no master or mistress in this world whose honour or prestige is safe in their hands. If there is no moral delinquency to furnish anything sensational, it is, indeed, a very few lucky people who escape other charges. I used to overhear, no end of complaints or swearing by servants, regarding the vulgar parsimony of this mistress or that, who stinted at giving money for the marketing, but expected a shilling's worth for a penny, and always suspected the honest ayah or chokra of stealing money. The purchases were exhibited by the women to whichever gossip stopped them

on the way and a harangue about the number of items they were charged to buy with a meagre sum of two annas or so, began, highly derogatory to the reputation of the unfortunate mistress in question. Sometimes two or three of these servants gathered together and enacted dramas and farces impersonating their mistresses and masters and overdoing their parts, till tears streamed from the eyes of the laughing audience. I remember one of these dramas very vividly on account of its extraordinary plot, which I shall narrate here.

Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Austin passed for very good friends and often exchanged courtesies by way of sending each other presents of curries and sweets, when anything nice was cooked in the house. While Mrs. Smith was a frank and simple soul, and was always anxious to share her good things with her best friend, Mrs. Austin was her direct antipodes in nature. She was quite ready to part with samples of ordinary curries and cookies to her dearest friend, but when it came to sharing anything special even with Mrs. Smith, it was like cutting off one of her own limbs. Hence special delicacies were guardedly prepared and quietly partaken by the members of the family, but since the degree of acquaintance that existed between the families was so close allowing the members the fullest freedom in each other's houses, there was always the danger of one of the Smiths dropping in when they were not wanted.

One morning, however, when Martha, the twelve year old maid of Mrs. Austin was plucking

the feathers of a particularly fat chicken, that was killed for the breakfast, Georgie Smith, a boy of a particularly healthy appetite, and fond of good viands, innocently strolled in and saw the chicken. Mrs. Austin's heart sank within her. Sure and certain Georgie would go and tell his mother what the Austins were having for dinner. She could not really give away any of it, and if she did not, her friend would think her mean. How was she to get over the fix? Mrs. Austin, however, from long experience of explaining away her inconsistencies had a very fertile brain and a brilliant idea came to her relief at once. She made the cook boy her accomplice and together they rehearsed a most comical drama. She prepared the bird and all the Austins picked it to the bones which were Towser's portion of the feast. The dish was clean emptied and nothing was sent to the Smiths. In the evening Mrs. Austin called on her dearest friend and asked her :

"How did you like the chicken stew, Alice?"

Mrs. Smith, taken by surprise, asked, "What chicken?"

"Why, I mean, what I sent you this morning of course?" replied Mrs. Austin unabashed. "We had chicken for dinner to-day and I sent you your share?"

"I never received any curry from your house today, Polly."

The cook boy who had been hanging about the house now came upon his cue as if to give his mistress some urgent message.

"Never got it? Shocking," said Mrs. Austin and seeing the 'boy' who was trying to control himself for all he was worth, she turned to him sharply and in a very serious tone asked: "Boy, what did you do with the curry I told you to take and give this doraisany Amma?"

The boy managed to answer under a simulation of guilt and fear, "Towser ate it up, Ma'am."

"Towser ate it up?" she exclaimed in fetched up anger. "How could you let the dog get it? You wicked rogue. And so much gravy too, Alice. I feel so wild. Wait till I go home and report this to the dorai. Let him give you what you deserve."

Martha told us that both mistress and boy had some rehearsals of this drama before Mrs. Austin left, and poor Towser, who had got nothing but the bones to crunch, was made the scapegoat. Martha was still in skirts and jackets and her hair was just growing after it had all dropped off on account of an attack of typhoid, which the girl had had recently. She and Amrutam, Anai's younger sister, seemed to have a hereditary feud between them, for if Martha was reminded of charcoal whenever she saw Amrutam, who was a very black girl, then Amrutam was inspired with a rhyme about bald heads as soon she saw Martha. The two girls were always teasing each other, and this is how Amrutam used to sing—

Mottai, mottai, moluku saar
Kambu roti deko mar;
Ara mudi thainga
Koota curry manga.

(Bald head, bald head, pepper water
See and pat the millet cake;
Half a shell of cocoanut
Some mess with green mango.)

Amrutam's jaws were always overworking. She would be seen continually tossing into her mouth, one by one, a handful of katmambalam, or payir. Her mother used to complain that the girl was never thirsty and never drank a cup of water unless forced to, and that within an hour after finishing a heavy meal the girl was capable of taking such another again.

Now, to continue my discourse on gossip, one of the women asked my mother, perhaps to test her, whether adultery was a pardonable sin. Then it was that my mother tacked on certain conditions and clauses to the sixth commandment, which perhaps she thought, God had omitted by inadvertence. She interpreted this commandment as containing an extenuation for those, who committed adultery under pressure of circumstance. According to her, it was not a sin, if a woman was a widow or a destitute and needed a man's help (God perhaps abandoned widows and destitutes to shift for themselves) especially, if she had a number of children to bring up. When she had read the Bible why did she not say, that the widow, the orphan, the destitute are the ones who are specially in God's mind and that He would not forsake them unless they forsook Him? She went further than this and explained that it was also not a sin in the case of a woman, who was ill-treated by her

husband. What preaching of the Gospel to the 'heathen' and what a moral guidance to growing young children in whose presence such things were discussed !

Child as I then was, I understood why my mother was so anxious to investigate and discuss other people's characters, adding her own exaggerations when passing the rumours on. That gave her a satisfaction, that there were other people too like herself. There was, however, no idea of reflecting on the fact whether it gave satisfaction to her Maker, if she explained when face to face with Him, that there were others too like her. Her self-satisfaction made all our lives a tragedy. Sometimes, when I was taught to tell the usual lies to father regarding her affair, I would tell her that in Sunday School, we were told that God punishes liars. She had a fit answer for everything and for every occasion, satisfying herself, if it satisfied nobody else and she made people feel that the Gospel itself was less important than her own opinions on any matter concerning herself ; for if it concerned some one else, then, of course, everything was different. In this instance, because she wanted us to tell lies to father, she came out with her own interpretation of God's mind as usual, saying, with a pshaw :

" If God were to punish people for all such trifling things, where will the world stand ? "

Deliberately concocted lies in order to deceive, ' trifling ' things ! And then, what an influence to shape and mould our young characters ! If

we told the lie to her, however, we tasted her vindictiveness and knew how severe she could be on such occasions. How bold, how daring, how audacious for us to continue in sin, with no desire to give it up, and when God gives a comparatively long life and many chances to turn from our evil doings, to interpret His long suffering patience, as if He were overlooking our wanton acts of mischief involving the suffering of not only those whom we hate, but even of those whom we love, and innocent souls as well! Let not my readers think, that I am too hard upon my own mother. This account written almost with my heart's blood, is to let other reckless mothers, fathers and everybody see, what terrible calamities and lifelong pain we inflict on those dear to us, let alone our wrongs to the world and sins against an unseen God, by our false philosophies and our determination not to give up the path we have taken no matter whom we sacrifice.

CHAPTER XVI

CHRISTIAN FESTIVALS

THE want of a proper schooling did not altogether have a baneful effect on a pensive, deep thinking mind like mine. Things experienced in no other period of my life stand out so vividly clear before me as those which occurred or were observed by me during this period of forced idleness. Yes, I can recall to mind, among other things, the scenes of the Sabbath, as Sunday is usually called. For the Protestants, there was very little church going on a great many days in the month, but the Roman Catholics, I believe, had ordinary service every day, and a festival every other day. If only Christians--Protestants, Catholics and all--only started to purify and clean up their lives at home, instead of being quite satisfied with the daily, weekly or periodical excursions to the church, to mumble prayers there and to come back to live un-Christian lives for the rest of the time, as I and many other Christians are doing, what a force the Church would be to make the earth a happier, holier place! Nay, there are so-called Christians who tell you that God, in giving divers gifts to humans, has

endowed some with less power of resistance to evil and temptation than to others. Then what an unjust God He must be to give but one law to all, and not separate codes to the weak and the strong and to judge everybody by that one law! It is simply amazing, how resourceful the human brain is to invent excuses for misconduct and trying to find support for it in misquoting the very Scriptures, held to be sacred.

I used to see the Roman Catholic women of our neighbourhood go to church, usually dressed in white and veiling their heads, and in their hands their breviaries or rosaries or whatever else those paraphernalia are called. Now and then I went with Ammanni and her people to St. Xavier's Church. We used to kneel on the verandah perhaps on account of going late, for the church would be already filled and the congregation overflowed on to the verandah. But whatever the reason may be, I saw only topce-wallahs on the benches inside and only Natives on the floor outside. The service here was like Pentecost in a way, for the responses and Lord's prayer, and everything repeated by the congregation was in the several tongues of the worshippers, while the service itself was, I believe, conducted in Latin. I used to hear the Tamil people with whom I knelt say a musical prayer beginning with, "Achchishta Siluvai, adiyalathi nalai". We all gave collections. But though I liked to go to St. Xavier's for a change, I did not like continuing all the time on my knees. In the Church of England kneeling is made easy by

cushions. I suppose they had cushions inside the church here too. My father used to tell a funny story about this silent kneeling business. It seems a man who went to post a letter at break of dawn, mistook for a pillar-box, one of the women worshippers who knelt on the roadside wearing a red dress and tried to drop the letter into her.

The Roman Catholics observed a curious kind of fast during Lent; as for the Protestants, I have not seen any observing a fast at all. But this fast was by no means abstention from food among our neighbours, for instead of rice and curry, their accustomed food, they substituted sweets and fruit for one of the heavy meals. On Palm Sunday, they all used to bring from the church palm leaf crosses, which they nailed to the walls, and lintels of the doors. The children were all in their best on Easter Day, the girls in their new skirts and jackets, the boys in their baggy chintze trousers and coats and caps. They did not take off the caps on festival days even at home. Fastened to the tapes of their skirts and drawers, the boys and girls carried small cloth purses in which on Easter Day they kept the money they had received as presents.

One seldom saw cropped heads in George Town. The Tamil people had most of them an arch-like shaved patch on the front of the skull and wore the rest of the hair long, usually done up in a knot, or cut the hair short and sometimes close to the head, but the

patch was there all the same. The home dress of the ordinary boys was a komanam, which was all but stark nakedness. The men wore red or white mundus for the most part, knee length or ankle length according to the width of the cloth, the mundu enclosing both the legs in its winding, though not restricting free movements. Some men wore the veshti which, unlike the mundu, had leggings, not cut out but twisted round the legs dexterously. But at home, they were all bare backed, though when they went out they put on a shirt, or something more. Even now wealthy men, and those in high position and office, who do not care for Western fashions can be seen at their homes with just a piece of cloth round their loins and not even a shirt to their backs, and what is more, in this unconventional costume they receive callers.

Well, to go back to the Christian festivals, I believe it was in St. Xavier's that I saw some huge images, may be larger than life-size, of some of the Gospel characters. The only one of whom I am sure was Judas Iscariot, because he was perpetually hanging with a halter round his neck. Once, whether at San Thome or St. Thomas' Mount, which I cannot recall by any effort, I saw a procession of images, illustrating Christ's whole life, or perhaps, only His passion and death. It is just a dreamy, hazy idea of a grand pageant I saw. But once a year, during some particular festival, there was a procession of chariots bearing images or effigies which passed through our street. It was a glorious

pageant. There were paper decorations everywhere, festoons, chains and flags and at intervals overhead in the street, paper lanterns shaped like stars, bells and other things. At one such interval stood the figure of an angel and when a particular image passed under it, I believe it was a representation of Christ, the angel dropped a shower of blossoms on the chariot.

If I remember well, it was from the beginning of December, that every Saturday evening carol parties went round singing. The items on Christmas Eve, however, were most interesting. The European carol singers carried an organ with them and set it down wherever they stopped to sing. One item, I particularly remember was the 'Sembu Kuthu'. What that meant I cannot say, but it was a function got up by the Roman Catholic youth, in which a number of boys with make-ups for their faces, and in a red-and-green uniform, performed a kind of dance to the tattoo of their own cymbals which they struck all together at the same interval, rhythmically. The others of the party, who were not in costume, stood round singing, while the rest made a square enclosure by stretching their poles for the dancers to perform within, whenever the procession stopped before a house. It was a very thrilling time for us and we youngsters not wishing to miss any of the tamasha would beg our parents to wake us up, whenever something came along.

During the whole of December, the sprinkling of cow-dung dissolved in water, and the

elaborate tracing of the snow white designs of the kolam, went on bravely, giving the whole month a joyous festive air, and by Christmas Eve, we sought to give the finishing touches to the plastering of the floor, and decorating the whole house with many and many a beautiful pattern and even some fantastic shapes, traced with a white liquid made of fine rice paste dissolved in water, to ensure more permanency to the kolams than when they were drawn with the easily fading chalk powder. The walls which gleamed like marble with their Christmas white-washing and still smelling of chunam, were given a brilliant red border of 'semmannu' or red clay running alongside the foot, till the floor with the white kolams and the red border of the walls, looked like a beautiful and costly carpet. Every woman took a pride in excelling herself in this artistic work, and the mistress and daughters of a house seldom left this decoration business to the servants. It was like Christmas, only when things were done in a hurry. What excitement prevailed when Christmas purchases were made, Christmas dresses stitched in haste, and Christmas palaharams prepared on a large scale for distribution, besides our own use! And then how madly happy were we making paper chains, festoons, flowers, flags, stars and lanterns and other things for decorating the walls and ceilings! Emmie cut out gold paper letters for A Merry Christmas. The bits of waste coloured paper seemed to beautify rather than disfigure the house. It seems like centuries

since Christmas was a joyful occasion to me! It continues to come round every year, continues to be celebrated in the same hilarious way by the majority of Christian households in the world, but for me, I seem to have no part with the living. I chide myself for not rejoicing among universal rejoicings, for what is my petty personal sorrow that I should make so much of it? The spirit recognises pettiness no doubt, but the flesh is really overwhelmed. I am unable to reason with myself in any connected way as yet.

Attending church on Christmas Day, was a great event. So much was the significance of the Redeemer, ignored by us who were making all these outward celebrations, that we actually used to quarrel invariably before setting out. I was eager to start early and admire the church decorations, and quarrelled with those who were delaying. The delay in many cases was to dress ourselves to the best effect, no matter if we were late to church, and missed half the service. Then, father invariably presented mother her Christmas dress without consulting her taste in the purchase of it and she refused to wear that to church, preferring either to use one of her old ones or to stay at home and cook the Christmas dinner, and he insisted on her wearing what he had given her and coming to church. And each one of us thought we were good, or at least respectable, Christians, because we took the customary trip to church, read something, sang something, muttered something and listened to something. Our idea was something like this.

It was not a righteous conduct that God valued so much from His worshippers ; but He was highly flattered, or at least satisfied, with our lip service, when our hearts were miles away from Him.

Well, service over we returned home, the young girls in joyful expectation of being sent out in their Christmas clothes, under the escort of a brother or a servant, with trays of Christmas sweets and fruits to the houses in the neighbourhood. After we delivered the presents to one family, we returned home with the empty tray to get it filled for another trip. Girls from the other houses similarly came to ours with their trays covered with silk or cotton cloth, till the room where we kept the presents was loaded with sweets and bananas and oranges and pan and other things. Sweets, sweets, everywhere, and we ate and ate, even after we had lost the relish for them, as if that were one of the ways in which Christmas had to be celebrated. Often, the sweets that we distributed and the sweets that we received were of the same sort, so that beyond the pretty courtesy that lay behind these formal gifts, there was no real meaning in exchanging the same things. The most common and the most inevitable items were the adirasams, the red and white varieties, both flat rice cakes the size of a large biscuit, slipped from the mould in twos and threes into boiling ghee or oil in a pan, taken out after done, and the ghee pressed out of them between a perforated iron ladle and a flat wooden one. Rice paste mixed with jaggery formed

the material for the red cakes and mixed with sugar the white cakes. Then there were the sweet balls shaped into hard spheres between the hollows of the palms, from a loose material of black gram powder and sugar and some other ingredients made lumpy by the addition of liquid ghee to enable the moulding. Kalkals, which were dough nuts, and golusas—biscuits shaped like sponge cakes—made up the traditional list. We used to make some nice pies and puddings from wheat flour and finely grained broken wheat, all fried in ghee. They were puries, huge wafers coated with sugar after removal from boiling ghee; somasies, each containing enclosed in a bean-shaped covering of wheat paste, a spoonful of some sweet stuff, often mashed poppy seeds, almonds, sugar-candy and some other things garnished with currants. Rava ladus or sweet balls consisted of fine grains of broken wheat, almond or cashew nuts finely shredded, scrapings of dry cocoanut, sugar or candy all mixed up and made into balls with ghee. But since these wheaten sweets were costly, we did not prepare them for distribution except to some special friends.

We eagerly looked for Christmas dinner. On other occasions like a birthday, we might have kichri, sweet rice or puliharam but for Christmas it could not be anything other than pulav, meat and rice cooked in ghee with saffron and spices, and then our favourite side dish, the traditional one, was chicken fried, roasted and stewed. We had dhall and vegetables also, but sometimes the younger children were so stuffed with eating the

sweets that we did not sit down to dinner with any appetite.

Confirmation was a much greater event in Roman Catholic than in Protestant families. The occasion was celebrated almost as grandly as a wedding. Some of the neighbours joined together and hired a coach for the candidates from their houses and the poorer boys and girls all wearing new clothes set out on foot to the church. When they returned, they all brought what looked like palm leaf scrolls. Our next door neighbours went in a coach by themselves as two of Mangalam's children, Ratnaswamy, *alias* Anai, and the eldest girl Rajathi had both to be confirmed. After the function in the church was over, they made a short detour and took a drive before returning home. As the two candidates were given the place of honour in the carriage and the others sat more obscurely, the street folks had taken the two children for a bride and bridegroom, a common sight in India.

CHAPTER XVII

SOME FESTIVALS AND AMUSEMENTS

○F the many non-Christian festivals, our favourite ones were, of course, Deepavali and Mohurram. The other periodical ones which I remember ever so slightly can be dismissed with a few words. Close to Madras, there is a small extinct volcano called Chinna Malay, whither the people went on a pilgrimage at a certain season of the year, with offerings of ghee, fruits, cocoanuts and other things, which I was told they dropped into the crater to keep the goddess in perpetual good humour. I have never seen the hill myself, nor exactly what happens there, but I remember the crowds of pedestrians and the numerous bandies, loaded to their fullest capacity with human cargo making their way in one constant stream towards one direction, and it was quite interesting to watch the splashes of colour, the jewels, and gaiety one saw in the huge concourse.

All that I can picture of another Hindu festival, the Pongal or feast of sweet rice, was the appearance of cattle with tinted horns and painted bodies, their brows bound with strings of bells, beads or flowers, their horn-tips carrying

ornaments, and with jewels round their necks and even on their legs. I heard that they were usually driven over a heap of live coals. I suppose it was wayfarers, who had no homes to cook their pongal on the feast day, whom I used to see here and there in street corners preparing the sweet rice in small earthen pots over a makeshift stove. The painted horns kept the effect for a much longer time than the hides from which the saffron and vermilion soon faded away in a few days. The horns which might have been attractive with a uniform colour was often in piebald fashion, which did not show so well.

Pullaiyar Chouthi, or the festival commemorating the nativity of the elephant-headed god, gave us some fun in its own turn, for the markets and stalls were full of his clay images in all sizes set in rows for both pious and impious customers to buy. We bought an image or two, for mother needed the clay to plaster over some cracks in the fire-place and we the youngsters reducing the god to a lump of clay again started making pottery for the dolls. I liked the vermilion powder, and the flowers given in a piece of plantain leaf for the worship and the ornaments which were sold to deck the person of the deity.

Deepavali provided a revel for us. It was our Guy Fawke's Day. We, however, started celebrating it long before the actual date and continued the celebration even after the day had passed; for who in childhood's care-free days could resist the charms of fire-works? During all our

waking hours, there were the crackling and booming of crackers and the loud explosions of detonators here and there, the wheezing sound and upward gushing of a geyser of sparks now and then, a stray fire-wheel and after nightfall, a house here and a roof there, suddenly illumined with coloured matches, bits of magnesium ribbon and sticks which when lit would shoot out a shower of brilliant sparks. The revelry was at its height on Deepavali day. The crackling, whizzing and explosions were like a battle-field when firing was hottest. The geysers and fire-wheels, the matches shedding red or green or blue rays, or showers of dazzling shooting stars, and the ribbons and wires which flared with an incandescent light, and every now and then the release of a flood of coloured light which bathed a large area with its glory, turned the night of the New Moon into a firmament of flashing revelling meteors and comets and stars and suns of dazzling splendour and gorgeous colours. The Hindus lit up their houses with rows and rows of steady or flickering castor-oil lamps, each consisting of a small clay saucer with oil and a wick. Of course, they were days when even in Madras there were no electric lights.

If Deepavali was welcomed for its fireworks, the season that gave us the greatest fun was Mohurram or the fesival of Allah Sawmy, with its 'tigers'. I believe it lasted for nearly a fortnight. From early morning till nightfall, one heard the constant beating of drums, of processions coming up the street or receding, now at our

doors, now at a distance, and saw party after party, escorting, to the noise of drums, their own tigers who marched in twos or more or even singly, dancing all the way and giving performances wherever they stopped. Tigers of all sizes and ages, singly or in groups frisked and danced on their hind legs and darted to this side and that as if aiming their paws at an imaginary prey and only restrained by their managers who led them in chains. The tails were glorified affairs, making a huge upward sweep, the curved end decorated with an enormous and gorgeous tuft, and no wonder that some one had always to walk behind the animal holding the tail. Though the older children knew that a Mohurram tiger with its stripes of yellow and black, or red and green, or any two colours, with the lime in its mouth and its artificial tail, was only a man or a boy, still, if the creature turned its masked face and gave us one look from its goggling eyes, under which there was a fierce mouth with a scarlet tongue lolling out, the girls and small boys screamed and fled for life. There were tigers and tigers, from sunrise to sunset, stalking abroad in their season to the pealing of drums. In fact, the only idea that many children have of a tiger, who have never seen a real one, in a zoo or circus, is the Mohurram tiger, and a number of the little ones are verily convinced that these creatures do devour children and especially the naughty lot. For days after the Mohurram season, little boys could be seen staging the tiger performances, a number of them

making an infernal clang and clatter with whatever things may serve for a drum in their hands, and in the middle of their circle one or two little urchins dancing and darting. When Ammani's little brother once gave us a performance, his sister sang a familiar rhyme: "Ha, puli varudu puli; aru masam conjee illaday kutti potta puli varudu, puli," which without the untranslatable rhyme, must sound like nonsense, for here is the literal meaning: "The tigress is coming; the tigress which had brought forth her cubs after famishing for six months without her rice gruel."

If Mohurram chiefly meant the tigers, other shows, performances and fancy dresses were not wanting, the carnival reaching its culmination on the last day. Every now and then you heard the cries of "Ali, Ali; Doola, Doola; Hassain, Hassain; Hussain, Hussain". You ran out to see a procession going very fast and with the same shouts repeated without end. One carried aloft like a banner, a card-board hand, representing I believe the hand of the martyr. The leader of the procession shouted a name and the rest repeated it, in a chorus till you had "Ali, Ali; Doola, Doola; Hassain Hassain; Hussain, Hussain" ringing in the air. Now and then a party of men with their faces and hands smeared black with soot and grease appeared at a trotting pace, running from house to house, and rushing in, usually selecting the residences of those supposed to be under obligation to pay them tips. These fellows might be servants or peons, or simply

municipal workers, like scavengers, street sweepers, drain cleaners who claimed bucksheesh from those residing in their particular beats. They came rattling a tin half full of pebbles making enough noise and din to destroy one's nerves, and never stopped the rattling or their noisy clamour for tips till they got something and even then they quarrelled and protested as being short of their expectations and did not hesitate to smear the clean clothes of their victims with the soot and grease on their hands, especially if they happened to jostle with them in a crowd. Some came with chalk on their faces and limbs either all white or blotched with black. Fellows came in all kinds of fancy dresses, but all for tips.

One of the common things I have seen in my childhood was a funeral procession, where the corpse was only an effigy on a stretcher serving for a bier and a great lamentation was sometimes raised by the mock mourners. Some one asks: "When did he die?" "Tomorrow," comes the answer from the chief mourner. "When is the funeral to be?" "Yesterday", and some more humorous chatechism follows.

Once I witnessed a mock Salvationist party. There is a Tamil lyric which begins with: "Yesu vai thudhi sai nee manamay; Yesu vai thudhi sai," (Praise Jesus, Oh my soul, praise Jesus.) Real Salvationists when they go street preaching, make their kirtans or choral worship to the accompaniment of several kinds of musical instruments. The leader of this mock regiment, held like a violinicello, an agupai, a long ladle with a bamboo

handle and a half cocoant shell for its head, in common use everywhere in Madras. Running his fingers up and down this ladle as if he were strumming imaginary strings, the leader sang a parody of the above lyric in this manner: "Dost thou need an agupai handle oh my soul; dost thou need an agupai handle?" and the whole company joined in the chorus: "Agupai kambu venuma, nee mana mai."

Another time, I saw a man vigorously shaking a rattle-drum, go at a run with a number of naked or scantily clad ragamuffins at his heels and entering the house of a Christian family near by and prance from end to end of the hall, shaking the rattle, with the ragged rogues behind after him. This Pied Piper and his army of street children went through a sort of catachism in this manner.

Pied Piper: "En pullengla!" (Oh, my little ones).
Urchins: "Eh pa?" (Well, papa).

Pied Piper: "Ungo amma koopta poringla?" (If your mamma wants you, will you go to her).

Urchins: "Illay pa". (No papa).

Pied Piper: "Nah koopta varingla?" (If I call you, will you come).

Urchins: "Amah pa". (Of course, papa).

When the whole mad performance was over, the Pied Piper who was perhaps a servant of the house, or a peon, took up a tragic pose and appealed for charity to help him bring up his army of children who no doubt had many fathers and mothers and were only picked up by this man to play their part in the show. The farce

was immensely interesting to me in those far off days.

Then there appeared the group of beggar boys who came on ordinary days as well for alms. Their peculiar trick was to twist their bodies into all kinds of fantastic shapes and attitudes and bang their bare backs to resounding blows with their palms, shouting all the time: "Ah udathey, udathey", intended to give one the impression of a thief being caught and punished.

The crowds, the amusements, the shows, the noise—I will not call it music—of kettle-drum, pipe and bugle, the crop of newly sprung up stalls for selling all manner of toffee, bonbons and lollypops, fruits, sweets, toys and fancy things, all gave the whole atmosphere a festive character as long as the Mohurram lasted. The last day, when the images of the tombs, the tazias were taken out in procession to be immersed in the sea, was the greatest day. Every hour was crowded with programmes, and Popham's Broadway was a sea of human heads. Those of us who had friends in the Salvation Army managed to obtain permission to view the processions, the tom-toms and tamashas, from the Army Headquarters building. All sort of people turned out to see the final celebrations. I guess that it is on the last day too that we see fire-walking, but I am not quite sure of that, though one night my father took us out somewhere to see some boys and men performing the feat. To the Salvation Army Headquarters, I went with the overseer's family,

Ranjitham looking very attractive in a snow white muslin skirt and blouse, a delicate gold chain with a cross reposing on her bosom, a pair of fine gold bangles on each wrist, and with wavy chains of silver on her anklets. Through the bars of the gate, we bought things to eat from the vendors who came there and whereas the children preferred toffee, Mrs. Masilamany purchased boiled beans flavoured with salt and cocoanut scrapings, and seasoned with long pepper, karuvepala leaf and other ingredients. Usually boiled beans or gram which they call payir was not for refined or dignified ladies to patronise and hence Mrs. Masilamany, as an apology for her taste, pronounced a panegyric on spiced stuff and gave us all samples of her purchase to try and her choice was right, for nothing tasted so well as the payir on that day.

The extraordinary thing about the Mohurram season was that in spite of its being a purely Mahomedan festival commemorating the martyrdom of the prophet's grandson, it was mainly the Hindus of the lower castes and classes who held the carnival, every one who had some sort of a vow, going in for some fancy dress or some part in the festival of Allah Sawmy—God Allah—who easily found a place in their pantheon.

The kite season was one of great excitement for boys and men and even for little girls. Kites sailed everywhere in the sky, red, green, blue, yellow, orange, purple, white, plain, multi-coloured, with beautiful or fantastic patterns; kites, which attacked each other quite often, and

after a battle royal was fought crashed on a tree or roof or telegraph wires when vanquished, or mounted up in triumph again after a victory. Often the worsted ones, cut off from their steering drifted into space and came to the earth far from the scene of battle, making it impossible for the victor to seize his spoils. There were kite-fliers on every terrace and those who had no such convenience stood in the streets and watched or took part in the game. The string was often smeared with powdered glass to enable the kite to cut the enemy down easily and the flier protected his own skin, by allowing the string to unwind itself from a reel revolving on an axis held in his hands. Dorais and natives, young and old, enjoyed kite flying and there was keen competition to attack and defeat each other, and to gain trophies. We simply loved to watch the sight and sometimes a kite crashed on our own roof with its long string trailing behind or getting entangled somewhere and we seized the prize and possessed it, if it remained unclaimed.

The first aerial flight by man I had witnessed was in a balloon. The pilot after making his ascent made his descent by a parachute and those who could not repair to the spot whence he made these demonstrations crowded the terraces and lined the streets. The balloon rose like a football and became a speck, and the parachute descent was like the dropping of a beetle from the sky.

CHAPTER XVIII

EXCURSIONS

MANY people in George Town had never seen the sea. Though I do not recall when exactly I saw the sea for the first time, I remember going to the beach quite often with aunt Krupa and her chums, one of whom was a young man. This man evidently used to take a delight in my terror at the tumbling of the waves and would drag me by the hand till the waves came up to his own knees and almost engulfed me, a screaming, struggling little mite, kicking up my dress till the spray of the next wave overwhelmed me and made me stand still and gasp. I was very small before aunt Krupa finished her course and left Madras. My father used to go out for walks once in a blue moon; he was so busy that he had no time for recreation of any kind, unless the doctor severely warned him. At such times, Robinson Park, the Pier, or the breakwater, was his most popular resort, and it was me he always chose for company. We did not go to the breakwater from the entrance to the harbour, but climbed an iron ladder at the back of one of the moles. I can tell no more. But I remember the waves

breaking from under the wall on the landward side, and when I went to the top holding fast to my father's hand, I could look down at the water below, quaking with fear. I heard that Amrutam's father who was a harbour cooly, had an accident one day and fell into the water, but was fortunately rescued by a barge that lay near by.

Once, when we had a large company of uncles and aunts and cousins, we went for a picnic to the beach—in which part of Madras is more than I can tell now—but we waded along our way through shallow pools or small lagoons with many casuarina trees rising from the flood and I believe some Alexandrian laurels too grew there, for we picked up any number of the stones of the berries on our way. They call this the ponna tree in Tamil, and the berries, ponna kais. The green covering is scraped off and the smooth and perfect globe of a nut is pierced with a nail or a sharp blade, and through this minute hole the kernel is excavated, and the shell with the hole thereof made a good whistle for Madras boys and girls. Davy and Harry could whistle in many ways without the aid of an instrument. My failures in trying to imitate them, often led me to a lonely corner, where I would breathe a pious prayer to the Almighty, asking Him to teach me how to do it. When I had actually begun to perform something, I incurred my father's displeasure and he put an abrupt end to my practice with the admonition that it was not a woman's pastime.

Now to go back to our pilgrimage to the beach, Davy who was always provokingly making himself very important, and causing the girls to feel little when they admired anything on the way with his boast that the object was nothing compared to something else that he had seen somewhere else, and turning to Harry for confirming the truth of his statement constituted himself the leader of the expedition. Both the brothers were terrible boasters, and while the other girls respected the superior knowledge and greater experience of the boys, I used to feel consumed with jealousy. If I ran forward to keep up with Davy and Harry, they would sneeringly order me back to walk with the 'females'—a term which has always been contemptuously used in India to indicate that women were of no consequence. To add to my chagrin, my mother's summons not to advance so hastily would give me yet another humiliating check.

When we arrived at the beach, there was no Ganesh Singh to drag me into the water and all that I did was to stand timorously where the breakers came farthest on the sands, and if I could not manage to hold my ground even in an inch of water, I would either run away as a wave approached or standing out of its reach would run after it in order to dip my feet in the brine as the wave receded. For the benefit of the small children we all dug small pools in the sand and the youngsters enjoyed tumbling into and out of them as they pleased. We went and saw some fishing boats returning with the

harvest of the sea and gazed at the colours of the fish and crabs and lobsters, though the fishy smell was not pleasant. The girls gathered heaps of sea-shells and cuttle-fish. When we had thus spent half our time, we sat down for refreshments. We had taken both coffee and drinking water with us in bottles, and the towel bundles contained dosais and liver curry, sweet vadais and banana fruits with green skins, the cooked things all packed up in green leaves.

I think mother had only two holidays in the year, one to spend at the Nadars' and the other for an excursion or picnic. She might have had a fortnight off at a time, had she consented to spend it at Sunderkote, but the very mention of her parents-in-law, gave her the fits, and as she had no near relatives of her own, she had no choice but to remain in Madras and send the children by turns during their vacations to visit their grand-parents, uncles and aunts. My sisters spent their long vacations at Sunderkote, or on a visit to an uncle or aunt at some other place, but I seldom cared for such a change, even from my monotonous life at home, unless I went in the company of father or mother. . . Hence a sightseeing excursion now and then, was an event in my life.

We once went in a party to see the museum, or the 'dead college', as the illiterate Madrasis call it, carrying refreshments as usual. I have nothing more than a jumble of ideas, as to what I saw here, the objects being skeletons of whales, and heads and horns of other animals,

perhaps stuffed crocodiles too, and un-remembered things in glass cases, a wooden man in a complete suit of mail, with a small cannon between his feet, and weapons everywhere. What other things we had spent so much time to see is all a blank to me now. There was a section to which there was no admission to folks under seventeen; so we cut that out. But the most vividly remembered object of this visit was a live monkey.

If I remember right, on both sides of the flight of steps leading to the entrance of the building, the garden was fenced off with wire from the rest of the grounds, and in the enclosure on one side there was a monkey chained to the wall or somewhere, and the creature could just touch the steps with an extended hand. At the sight of us it dashed out this side and that, tugged at the chain all the while gibbering and wildly pawing the empty air as if to seize imaginary tit-bits. Davy, a bigger monkey himself in his behaviour, tried to tease the creature by tempting it with a sweet cake and withdrawing the morsel, when the animal attempted to take it. But he had not reckoned with his opponent when he stood at the edge of the step, for the monkey enraged with disappointment, caught his breeches and was essaying to wound him, when Davy frightened out of his wits at the savage looks of the creature, dragged himself away, with a legging of his trousers in ruins. I think I have already mentioned my earliest visit to the People's Park,

or the 'living college' as the common folks call it in Madras. I remember a later visit quite vividly, and even here it was the monkeys that impressed me more than the fiercer wild beasts, and birds with beautiful plumage. I remember seeing a number of wooden houses or cages in the monkeys' section where these creatures could retire if they pleased. They were trained to do many tricks, but one particular beast acting the part of the purdah lady, was the most interesting of all. Just like her companions, she would be leaping and capering about and watching the sightseers in expectation of pea-nuts and fruits, no matter how many men were present and in those days the number of women excursionists was a very small percentage of the crowds, but if the keeper only shouted, 'men', this lady would make a dash for the hole of the cage, and hiding herself there, would demurely peep out, perhaps for fear of losing her share of the feed. If the keeper bade her come out of her seclusion, she would have no scruples to let the men folks see her and scrambled with the rest for the nuts.

This reminds me of the performing monkeys we usually see at our doors any day, one or two particular incidents connected with which amuses me to this day. The trainer a woman, in each case had dressed them up in petticoats and jackets, and placing a toy on the head of one asked her: "Which is the way to carry water to your mother's house?" The animal paced a few steps forward on her hind legs

carefully supporting the water-pot on her head, to show how it was a pleasure to do jobs for the mother. The trainer removed the toy and placed it on the performer's head again, this time asking: "Which is the way to carry water to your mother-in-law's house?" The expression of the monkey's face now changed into a frown as she violently pushed down the pot from her head, demonstrating the proverbial hatred of the daughter-in-law for her husband's mother, often a heartless tyrant. Another woman went through a catechism with her animal. Her own questions were audible, whereas the monkey's supposed answers were whispered into the ears of the mistress who interpreted the same to us. Of course, the monkey only moved its lips pretending to talk. The woman had introduced her monkey to us as a devil, and asked the beast: "Nee ala marathu peya? pulia marathu peya?" (Are you the spirit of the peepul or the tamarind tree). The monkey crept to her ear and whispered something which the woman explained to us: "She says she is the spirit of the peepul tree." Before finishing with monkeys and their tricks, I wonder whether any person familiar with India, has not once or twice seen a pet monkey hunting the lice in the particularly dirty and untidy hair of a particularly lazy slattern stretching herself like a log and enjoying a nap the while, or snoozing in the dullest most immobile sitting posture possible.

I shall close this discourse on apes and monkeys, our honoured ancestors, and relate

another incident that took place in the Madras zoo, which I saw. If a great many of the common folks of Madras have not seen the 'living college', it is not to be expected that rustics from the villages would have had any acquaintance with the wild beasts, but still every day there were visitors from both the City and outside. When we came to the lion's cage during our rounds, a middle-aged fellow, with a stubble on his lips and chin and clad in a dhoti and scarf was trying to get into the forbidden enclosure in order to have a closer view of the monarch of the forest, Reprimanded by the keeper and ordered to make his survey from the safer side of the fence, he grinned sarcastically as if at the keeper's ignorance and made the cynical remark: "This beast a lion? We have these fellows sneaking into our back-yards, any night in the village. He is no grander than a big jackal, I declare." His declaration, however, made no impression on the keeper, while we all laughed at his insisting upon calling the lion a 'nari'—jackal.

My excursions to the beach, the pier, the harbour, the dead college and the animals college have been described. Now let me say something of my visits to the market, not one of the famous ones of the City, but the one nearest to where we lived. It was somewhere on one side of Broadway and was called Paracheri kadai, the market of the Pariah quarter where, as far as I can understand, caste Hindus also bought and sold things. But one saw any number of ayahs and chokras, and doraisanies and missies

carrying their market baskets for their day's purchases, along with native women and girls. It was significant also how in spite of the squalid broken down appearance of a great many of these in gowns, they scrupulously avoided the company of a native, and when huckstering in Tamil with the sellers was inevitable, they used such a far-fetched accent that made others laugh derisively at their pretension. Some Anglo-Indian women were well dressed and looked superior and they seemed to be there in order to make a personal selection while the ayahs carried the purchases.

A kind of 'cool drink', very popular with the common people was the panan saar, or unfermented toddy juice. The woman who sold it carried the drink in a pot that was packed in a basket on her head. The basket contained a tin mug and a few tender palmyra leaves folded like a fan. If caste people bought a drink, the panan saar was measured out and poured into the mug which was reached out to the customer, who of course according to the Indian fashion did not put the vessel to the lips but dropped the liquid into the mouth from a height. But if the customers were Parayas or Christians or otherwise untouchable, the dirty rusty and musty mug could not be polluted by their touch. They held their palm to the lips and the woman opening out the palmyra leaf and forming it into a channel one end of which she placed in the customer's palm, poured the liquid gently into the leaf which conveyed it to the hand from which the buyer drank it.

What a number of kites I remember being on sale in this market! There were also the material for manufacturing the same, tissue paper looking very much like printed muslins of all colours and designs and patterns. I also remember the heaps of vegetables and flowers and toys and sweets and it was here that the half blind old woman sold her trinkets on the wholesale purchase of which I had seriously speculated, thinking they were real gold and silver jewels which the old witch offered three or four dozens a penny, because she could not see clearly! My picture of the Paracheri kadai is very foggy, but one more thing not altogether forgotten was the sight of the beggars. One particular fellow I have in my mind used to obtain much more for nothing than folks who made payments for their purchases. He went round from stall to stall with a big basket in his hands and collected a brinjal here, a spinach head there, at one place a green plantain, at another a dried fish, and at the mutton stall some bones till his basket was full with miscellaneous things. Yes, there were pie dogs, too, especially where bones could be picked up. I think these vague pictures sum up my rare visits to the Paracheri kadai with Thayee.

CHAPTER XIX

WEDDINGS AND PARTIES

UNDER the above caption, I am afraid I am committing myself to describing not only human weddings, but weddings of dolls as well. The most popular of our children's parties was 'kootan chore,' or company dinner. We usually got the provisions from our mothers and set out marketing with our own pocket money and made the necessary purchases. After everything was ready, we started cooking the banquet on an improvised stove or two. Sometimes, the hostesses allowed the girl guests to take part in the cooking, for it was such fun and everybody liked to do something. Then we spread the mats and laid the leaves for the whole company including small boys, our brothers and cousins, and it was a very merry time.

At one time a regular craze for dolls' weddings had seized us all, so much so, that almost every other day, a marriage was celebrated in our neighbourhood, and whenever that happened we had a nice party. To Indian children, the most commonplace the most natural thing perhaps in the world, is a wedding. Nothing is considered, or at any rate was considered about,

thirty years back, so inevitable as marriage. The very infants acquired this word as part of their earliest vocabulary, and nothing is so important an event in any household, like the marriage of one of its members. Again, even among Christians, except perhaps a few completely dominated by Western ideals, a single marriage is enough to plunge a family of moderate income heavily into debt, on account of the bulk of the people labouring under a time-honoured false notion that it was necessary for their prestige to go in for expenses beyond their means. Friends, especially women, never met without asking questions, as to whether this daughter's wedding or that son's wedding is under contemplation, and if so, who the other party is and what amount of jewellery is being demanded, and scores of other enquiries bearing on the same subject, many of them so silly and nasty as to shock people unaccustomed to hear so much of marriage. No wonder, when children thought of holding parties, the idea of a doll's birthday never occurred to them so naturally as a doll's wedding.

I suppose that for this particular craze aforesaid the impetus was given by a human marriage in the neighbourhood. It took place in Ammani's family. Her uncle, a fair and handsome man, but for a small bald patch on his crown, was the bridegroom. He wore his hair in the fashion that at the time of my writing, has grown a favourite with women, namely the bob. The first touches to the gay occasion were given by the

erection of a picturesque pandal or awning in front of the bridegroom's house, the roof being draped with cloth of red and gold, and the posts decorated with the binding of whole plantain trees with their bunches and long cocoanut fronds, that curved gracefully above and made the place a cool green bower, such a beautiful contrast to the brick and chunam desert of George Town. Mischievous children tore the strips from the cocoanut leaves to manufacture whistles and blew them the whole day long.

One afternoon a coach came and stood before Ammani's house. As we watched from the windows, Ammani's mother dressed grandly in a maroon coloured Benares silk saree of gauzy stuff and spotted and trimmed with gold, entered the carriage wearing all her jewels. She was accompanied by Ammani herself and Roja, both sisters dressed in silk skirts that had broad rainbow bands, and in blouses of purple velvet. They all had a black dot between their brows, for they were Roman Catholics, and all had sweet scented snow white jasmines in the hair, the young matron wearing a chaplet and the two girls having their plaits spun with ropes of jasmine buds. A large brass tray loaded with pan and almonds and candy was placed on the floor of the carriage, along with a small and empty tray. The ladies then drove to the houses of their friends, one by one, in order to serve the invitations and last of all they came to our house. When the carriage stopped at our door, Ammani's mother stepped out and

came in bearing the small tray where she had placed a share of the pan and candy and almonds to go with the wedding invitation, printed on a quarter sheet of yellow paper, yellow being regarded as the auspicious colour.

Later on the old lady, Ammani's grandmother, who being a widow could not make one of the party going round with the invitations, came to us to borrow some of mother's jewels and some of our cooking utensils. In India, except among cultured and well educated ladies adopting Western simplicity, women who have no costly necklaces bangles or ear-rings or some favourite ornament of their own, or possess only a few, feel that they cannot face such an important occasion like a wedding without shining at least in borrowed jewels. On the wedding day, we saw only the bridegroom's party setting out in carriages to go to church in a slow procession preceded by a brass band making music. When they returned the bride was with the groom, both seated side by side in a carriage by themselves except for some little children. It was an open landau so that everybody could see the pair, the man looking visibly embarrassed and the maid, with head hanging on her breast and scarcely lifting her eyes. She must have been fourteen or fifteen, for fortunately there is no child marriage among Christians in our country and she was fair and looked very 'charming' in her pink Benares saree, purple velvet bodice, sparkling jewels and a hood of pearly jasmine buds covering her head and sewn on to her plait.

Either we were not invited or did not go for the wedding dinner, but we attended the musical entertainment in the night, when friends and neighbours could have a leisurely view of the couple. In the reception room the two sat side by side on chairs like a king and queen on their thrones, the bride still with down looking eyes and drooping head. All the other people sat on the floor in Indian fashion on the covering mats, the women on one side and the men on the other. Personally I did not appreciate the music, for not only was there no melody in the tunes selected, but the brass instruments also shrieked mercilessly and the drums made a fiendish din, added to the piercing shrills from crying children. I stared at the beautiful bride with all my might, honouring her groom, with only a casual glance now and then, though he was handsome enough attired grandly in a silver-laced cotton dhoti, a green coat of some stuff, a silk scarf and a silver laced turban. He also wore shoes on his feet, those Turkish things with turned up toes. By and by my eyelids grew heavy and in spite of the drums and trumpets, I sank to the floor and joined the other youngsters in the land of nod. I have no notion when the bhajana was over and we returned home.

Every Indian girl regards marriage, as much the same kind of inevitable event in her life as the day of her own death, and she joyfully looks forward to that day, though she is much too shy to express it; not because she understands the importance of the change, but for the reason that

she will get nice clothes and jewels and much fuss will be made over the bride. Perhaps, in the Renaissance that is at present sweeping over the whole country, there are a great many school and college girls who will sneer and snigger at the idea, but in the days of their mothers, and even now in the country at large, where millions are still untouched by Western ideas, marriage was and is an inevitable event. If Sophie was altogether void of any worldly aspirations and ambitions, I know for certain that both Emmie and Mary speculated a great deal on their own wedding days and planned in their minds how they should conduct themselves on that day of their lives.

The marriage of Ammani's uncle had some repercussions in our family. One of my mother's necklaces was a string of coins, which was only half full. Since the Indian saree after covering the breast is taken over the left shoulder to the back, a patch of the bosom near the right shoulder, is always visible showing a part of the bodice and the necklaces. For this reason, those who cannot afford to have a full string of coins, and yet like to make an impression have the coins only on the exposed side, the bare thread being concealed by the folds of the saree on the other side. This half string of coins mother had lent to Ammani's people without father's consent, and he made a row about it. She fiercely maintained that he had no right to question her where her own dowry was in question, and he in that thunderous voice of his which used to make us

all tremble making her understand, that his possession of her had brought everything belonging to her under his control. Mother was not the one to give way; no, not even for the peace of the house. She might have avoided a scene easily by taking her husband's permission, when he was the master of the house, and also knowing perfectly well from the day of her marriage, what her husband's ideas were. But she took a perverted pleasure in going contrary to all his wishes and the house was full of strife.

On this occasion she went on protesting in that loud screeching voice of hers and invoking curses on all his household, for she never spared his parents and brothers and sisters, for his own sins. When Emmie interfered and told her for decency's sake at least to check herself—of course. Emmie's very words were: "Better hold your tongue mother"—the mother turned the vials of her wrath on the luckless head of her first born and after abusing her to her heart's content spoke: "And who gave you authority to criticize your own mother? It is just like you to take your father's part always. He is full of venom from head to foot. What else can be expected from the daughter of such a man, you vile harlot." She went on in this strain, till the irritation, proving too strong for him my father struck her with a cane, while we all screamed and she flung herself down in a corner, refusing to cook the food and making loud lamentations.

My father's fears in this instance were that even the best of friends sometimes betrayed their

trust and he cited some examples of borrowed jewels never returned, by downright denial, or on the plea that they were accidentally lost. Aunt Krupa had also once related a similar story of an incident which she had witnessed when she was travelling in a railway third class women's compartment. Two of the passengers were conversing so intimately and affectionately, that aunty thought they were either relatives or close friends. One of them had a gold collar on with a pagoda coin for a pendant and the other wished to try it on. The owner obligingly took it off her own neck and placed it round the other's. Aunt Krupa slept, but woke up at a particular station and found the two women in fierce altercation. The one who had borrowed the jewel was still wearing it and getting down with her luggage. To the angry demands of the owner for its return the other glared at her, called her a liar, an impostor, who was trying to seize other people's property by mere bluff. The train moved and the thief was gone leaving the victim to beat her breast and wail. When asked who or what the other woman was, the robbed one shocked aunty with the answer that she knew nothing of the wretch before she got into the train. I am sure that more than seventy-five per cent. of the murders taking place in India, are for the sake of the jewels on the person of the victim. Except the utterly destitute, every person wears at least an ounce of gold or silver in the shape of an ornament, which induces crime.

Perhaps a gentle remonstrance instead of a severe reprimand on father's part would have kept matters from reaching a crisis. I only say, 'perhaps', for I am not sure whether anything gentle or soft would have appealed to mother. Apart from that she had the backing of her lover and felt she could defy not only her husband but the whole world with such a powerful ally. The vile wretch had honoured my father with the nick name of 'The wild boar', because of the prominence of the two side teeth; and between the guilty pair, the master of the house was always designated by this unedifying epithet.

But the said marriage had a humourous sequel likewise. In the course of the day we got our share of the wedding sweets and the borrowed utensils were returned, all smelling of ghee and the pots and pans looking as if they had been dipped in ghee. My mother remarked aside on the want of decency on the part of her friends to return the vessels without washing them clean after use and rather jealously expressing her wonder as to whether they could be so extravagant as to prepare all those quantities of sweets in ghee alone. Davy with his ready wit came forward with his own interpretation: "No mother, I think not. They must have cooked everything in oil only, and just to impose on us smeared the pans and ladles with ghee before returning them. If they had not been so anxious to make us believe that they had used ghee freely like oil, why should they return the vessels without

washing them?" This made my mother laugh and get over her sulking.

The first dolls' wedding took place in the house of the Nehemiahs, where the older boys attended the Christian College, and while the older girls were married, the younger brothers and sisters attended Doveton College and had their Sunday Schools at Anderson's Hall, a circumstance by which I came to know the young ladies personally. They cut out the humble folk and issued the invitations only to their educated neighbours, and so while Rajathi, Amrutham and others of my friends were ignored, I received an invitation. They were all rubber-typed neatly, but the names of the couple were so extraordinary that we giggled to ourselves as we went through the cards. The bridegroom was the honourable, Squint-eyed Sowcar Mottai Meesai Dhan Singh (squint-eyed capitalist beardless Dhan Singh) and his bride, Miss Kadhu Arundha Janaki (Miss Janaki of the torn ear). They were two English dolls transformed into the likeness of an Indian Rajah and his princess by the skill of the sisters Kamalam and Pushpam. Their brother, Bobby, officiated as the priest during the solemn ceremony, and though I do not recall his funny words with Davy at his elbow to prompt him to be funnier still, I remember the whole congregation, the older Nehemiahs included, rocking with laughter from beginning to end. Then followed the reception at which the bridal pair were only mute spectators while the guests feasted on the delectable viands. We had tea with slices of bread and honey, a

dish of shredded banana made into a kind of fruit salad with milk and cream and sugar, then came some sweet vadais steeped in syrup and a few spiced stuffs and pan.

The next doll wedding took place in Ranjitham's house. There were about fifteen guests, boys and girls. Here no farce was gone through to represent the marriage rites, but we started with the banquet straight away. I was sorry Ranjitham had not asked me to help cooking. She had taken the assistance of the daughters of the other tenants of her house. We had plain rice and kichri, with side dishes of stewed fish, fried fish and some vegetable curry, but the food being served in limited quantities, even the poorest appetite was not satisfied. Those who had taken all the pains to cook had likewise to be content with half rations. Soosai, the apakarchi's daughter, who was one of the guests, was at that time suffering from the effects of a recent pricking of tattoo marks on her calves and feet. I asked her whether the idea of the pain did not deter her from going in for the operation and the answer coming from the depths of philosophic resignation is one of the few things I have never been able to forget. "It was really a torture," replied Soosai, "but then I remembered the passion of our Lord on the cross and thought that when He suffered so much, I should not complain for so little." What an association between the agony on the cross and the voluntary inconveniences gone through for a frivolous purpose! I had my own remarkable ideas of the

Scriptures too. One day Miss Vedavalli asked me, no doubt to prove that a limb in constant use develops more strongly than others, why the right hand was usually stronger than the left, and I came out with the illuminating answer, that it was so because God made Eve from a bone taken out of Adam's left hand.

CHAPTER XX

DREAD AND DISQUIET

I F I laughed and played or attended and gave parties, that was because childhood's natural buoyancy of spirits would assert themselves in the midst of a constant dread and disquiet. The world was going its own way and my mother was going her own way. In our very presence she would exchange words of ribaldry thinly disguised in harmless phrases, which, young as we were, we could see through. These cryptic words were often followed by vulgar peals of laughter, which were sickening to hear. I wondered how my father could continue to be so blind to the infamous dramas staged under his own roof, when the actors in their utter recklessness were sinning so openly, regardless as to what the very neighbours might think. None suffered the torture of mind to such an extent as I did, the only one staying at home, while the rest were either out most of the day, or not residing at home. Still all the children knew.

Davy, with his fiery spirit, might have plunged a dagger into the heart of the vile

desecrator of our home any moment had he been a little older. When I read of cold-blooded murders of faithless women or their seducers, my heart fails to pity the wretched victim of a homicide, maddened with provocation. Forgiveness under the circumstances may be the result of an extraordinary and God-like patience of a generous heart, but even God's forgiveness is not so cheap as to be wasted on the wantonly lewd, who feel no shame or pain for their own misdeeds and wronging others; who never think of turning away from the evils which they do in His sight. My mother's temper was growing intolerable. For every little thing she would rage and swear for hours, sometimes directly, but often in its most detestable form, indirectly. It made a wreck of our nerves, especially, when one could not question her on account of the indirectness of her remarks, and none did she abuse so persistently as my father behind his back, which made our blood tingle with anger. If a daughter or son protested, she would express her wonder that the latest wave of epidemic that swept over George Town had not carried off the individual in question. Philosophers have descanted and poets have sung beautiful things about a mother's love, a thing my mother was never tired of quoting or dinning into our ears, in season and out of season, while all the time she was making every moment of our existence a misery. She was quite satisfied with feeding and clothing us and ministering to our physical needs, no matter what example she set before her growing children,

and what anguish they suffered in mind and heart.

Emmie was always rebellious and had a temper and tongue like her parent's. Once she threatened to report the Dewan's clandestine visits to father, if the guilty man's acquaintance were not terminated forthwith. Emmie was about eighteen years old by this time and though regular studies had long been neglected in her childhood, she was in the F. A. class at Northwick. My mother's face was a sight to see. The devilish anger and the unrepentant guilt had distorted the features into something not good to look upon. However, she uttered not a word, but dashing to the heap of firewood, snatched the nearest stick and struck my sister so inhumanly, that the hand that Emmie had raised to ward off the blow was almost fractured, and for days swollen and painful that it could not be used. After striking her grown up daughter so brutally, to Emmie's tears and threats she gave the defiant answer: "What do I care, if your blackguard of a father comes to know of my friend's visits? I will shake the dust of my feet here and be off with him. He will cherish me like a parrot. Let your wretched father look after you all. I shall have only Meena with me."

Meena to consent to go to that vile serpent's protection! My mother had not understood me. Was it because, I was supposed to be, "a pearl among pebbles", as many people have openly remarked to the encouragement of my silly vanity? Even that dastardly beast, my mother's

hero, had forgiven me for being one of those who stood in his way, and offered to caress me, a thing I abhorred with the strength of my whole being. I to go with that unnatural mother, who wanted to desert her own other children! But Emmie, ill-treated as she was, feared to carry out her threat and report to father, dreading the consequences.

Emmie returned to Northwick, but there was no interruption to the daily performances at home and these were not without their due effect on Davy. He must have been naturally of a voluptuous character and his preference to the company of just those boys in the college, who had specialized in vices, of this type, made him a profligate before his time. He said and did obscene things which were shocking and revolting to all except those who were utterly depraved like him. That was his chief pastime. While he was ready to pierce the eyes of any young man who stared at one of his sisters, he himself persistently sought the company of young girls and enjoyed cutting vulgar indecent jokes with them and teasing them in all sorts of shameful ways. Indeed, the way he acted towards women, even if they were married and older than himself, makes me always feel that the calamity which befell him, after marriage had made him respectable, was but the reward his own conduct had merited at the hands of Nemesis. I cannot but feel convinced, in spite of the natural pity for a brother's woes, that God had given Davy to taste a

sample of his own mixture, at a time when he had taken upon himself to preach morals to others. There was a time when no girl or woman was safe, in the privacy of her bedroom or her bath when he was in the house. Our female visitors and guests were persecuted in this manner, and they were too polite or shy to complain. Our cousins were the chief sufferers in this respect. The least objectionable part of his conduct during these years, was making love to one girl or another. His behaviour was too indecent for words, and he whose own actions were so reprehensible, was for ever finding fault with others, criticising, judging and condemning those who were not a tenth part as vile as he. He knew what he did perfectly well. He would never think of approving or tolerating anything approaching it in other young men, but as far as he himself was concerned, he never in all his life admitted one action to be wrong, or if forced to recognise one misdeed as such, would lightly excuse himself or still more lightly justify his own conduct.

Even among Christians, in those days, girls above thirteen were kept under the purdah. One of our friends, Kamalam Nehemiah, in time became a purdah woman. But such girls like to watch others at play, or to see the street sights from a window though their faces are not covered when they go out which they can do in the company of elderly men or women. Once seeing Davy enter the house pushing the

door open without knocking, the girl having no time to run indoors hastily hid herself behind the open door. Davy knew that he had taken Kamalam by surprise, and she had nowhere to hide but the door, but all the same he caught her by the wrist and was dragging her out of her hiding place. Her eldest married sister, seeing this, a complaint soon reached my mother regarding Davy's behaviour. Mother did not believe that a child of hers was capable of such misdemeanour, but all the same, when Davy turned up that evening, she questioned him. With the genius he possessed to invent a passable story impromptu, he put on an innocent and offended expression of surprise, as he vindicated himself with: "But I thought it was Bobby, who was hiding there to tease me."

"I knew it was a false story," my mother remarked with that characteristic belief of hers, that wickedness of every manner was quite natural for other people's children, while her own were above reproach. This conviction coloured the answer she returned to Mrs. Nehemiah, that her son was not the sort of lad to commit such an outrage but that a slight blunder had been grossly misinterpreted. I had my own opinion, for I had seen what my mother had not, of Davy's actions when girls were present. As long as he was too young to be affected by sex questions, he used to express supreme contempt for feminine company and despise girls as 'useless, unmanly, of no consequence,' and any number of such

like epithets. But now, he sought them, to practise his course jokes, to tell sensual stories and anecdotes, scanning their figures with wicked eyes, and doing worse things in his gestures and actions. A number of girl friends and my cousins used to take me into confidence, and tell me awful stories of Davy's persecutions. I used to get wild with anger, but all that I could have done was to get my mother to take action, and that was out of the question, seeing that my mother was inclined to believe every one else a liar and her own offspring infallible. Failing other resources, I used to object strongly, to Davy's taking part in our games and gatherings, thereby inviting my mother's wrath for being an unnatural sister and too full of deep-seated malice and venom for my age.

Davy was intensely selfish and if anything could beat this failing, it was SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS, to be written in capital letters, thrice underlined and emphasised with three interjection marks besides!!! He had one rule for his own moral conduct, and another for the rest of the world. He might have murdered another youth who took the same questionable liberty with his own sisters, as he himself took in his dealings with other men's sisters and young wives too. He could scarcely tolerate people of his own sex, mixing with us or conversing with us, in innocent freedom, making them understand his emphatic disapproval, by the frown on his brow, the cold words of distance and reserve and even an insulting behaviour. Even

after becoming a family man, and leading a sober, serious and even religious life, he reserved to himself the right of moving about freely with women, denying the same to other men where his own household was concerned. "They are not to be trusted," was his definite, decisive and final answer or explanation, when questioned about such provoking discrimination. Here was a Pharisee of Pharisees, in flesh and blood, and not a mere character in a parable, who unabashed could say what amounted to, that he was not a sinner like other men! Even in the matter of confiding his troubles, to the last that I knew him, he preferred some woman or other to a man.

Well, he paid for it dearly. As he was my brother, his troubles pained me, but I could not help the conclusion that *Namesis* was at work. Not that he believed it himself, nor tolerated the merest suggestion that the calamities were the direct results and inevitable consequences of his own mistaken views. Grey hairs were no proof against his insulting rebuffs, when advised to alter his policy and reform his attitude towards others. He would not turn back an inch from the way which had so far brought him no peace of mind or satisfaction, and yet, such was the strange make-up of his character, that while he openly scorned advice as an uncalled for interference in his own domestic affairs, he did not keep those affairs to himself. On the other hand he was for ever harping on his troubles to others and publishing every trifling private matter unasked, always blaming the others concerned in doing so

blackening their characters and imputing base motives. Furthermore, he did not perceive anything wrong when he himself went about broadcasting his own private affairs, while he omitted no caustic or insulting term in condemning those who had merely relayed the information, on their own account. He heeded no signs nor words of warning, and in his unsurpassing self-righteousness, refused to open his eyes and search himself to see, how far the causes that provoked disasters lay in his own conduct. There were occasions when he could prove that a certain rigorous step he had taken was but the result of a particular action of somebody else against whom it was directed. If, however, the said measure had brought him satisfaction, and set things right, then it could be justified indeed. On the contrary, every severe measure he had adopted, made the breach the wider, and peace the more impossible. Still he went on growing madder at every failure and never wiser. Indeed, if drastic action alone could cure moral delinquency, and bring about peace, then God Almighty would have been the first to try this method. Yes, Davy paid for all his unrepented acts of wrong to others, and for his self-righteousness and perverse stubbornness, more, dearly than he knew, till the moment my own destiny cut me off from my brothers and sisters for ever.

I was dealing with the domestic tragedy in our family, and commenting on the effect of recklessness on the part of the older folks on the character development of youngsters with a

natural bent for going astray. Well, hating the Dewan as we did, with an indescribable hatred, we, the younger children were mean enough to accept of his bounty towards our pocket money, which we saved in our 'undis' or banks, each consisting of an earthen urn all closed over except for a narrow slit at the top, admitting the coins in but preventing their being taken out unless we smashed the bank. Davy's debts worried us so much that sometimes Harry and I made contributions from our own pocket money to clear up some of the outstanding accounts.

Even my father was not the soul of honour where veracity was required. During Sophie's illness, he used to consult and carry out the suggestions of other physicians and also of friends and make the doctor to whom he had entrusted the case believe, that he was scrupulously following his own instructions, and charge us all not to give him out. As for me, I found myself compromising with the things that my heart despised and hated. I stole change, if my mother had carelessly kept it anywhere, to buy toffee and toys and especially those sweet little dollies, only the size of my little finger then, with one carved arm laid on the bosom and the other clinging to the side. There was no righteousness in me any more than in the others, but whereas I knew that a certain thing I said or did was wicked, heartless or filthy, the others were not in the least worried that way. After I was grown up sometimes I have ventured to show that certain things were abominable in their own

nature, whether I was the sinner or another, and, oh God, the frightful reaction of it on my own head for saying so. They never examined their own thoughts and conduct in the same way or by the same rule, which they applied to others; they called me over-sensitive to regard what we did, in that light, and consoled themselves with the thought that they were not the worst transgressors in the world. In their own eyes they did not need any purging, and if they suffered the inevitable reaction of their own questionable deeds they argued that no one was exempt from trouble, the saints having the utmost tribulation in the world. But of course, what the saints had in spite of their unmerited suffering, namely, the fellowship with God and the peace that passeth understanding, was unknown to them and unknowable so long as they made light of their own iniquities and kept God miles distant. They have not only called me super-sensitive but also a traitor for refusing to take their part indiscriminately against those with whom they had misunderstandings. I have by now lived long enough to see that not only among individuals, but also among nations, there is one standard for their own conduct and another for their neighbours. No wonder the world is all awry. "The whole world is like that and we are no exceptions," my people had often cynically remarked to me, as if it was necessary for them to scorn truth and justice because others did so. If others are reckless, why should not we seek the right path and help them to turn from their own way?

CHAPTER XXI

MY FATHER'S HOLIDAY & ITS CONSEQUENCES

MY father who never had a spare moment for recreation, on account of his numerous private tuitions, both before and after college hours, and working at high tension with an insane desire to make money, one day took us by surprise, announcing his intention of taking a short holiday at Sunderkote to see how Sophie was getting on. The day of his departure came, and though he had so far never failed to take me anywhere with him, this time it was Harry on whom the preference had fallen. That morning we had taken in a cart-load of casuarina wood for burning, and while it was being conveyed into the house, a huge cobra dropped from one of the bundles. Fortunately it was not vicious, being too dull and heavy with an undigested frog in its belly and was easily dispatched. Though I had seen quite a number of scorpions, this was the first instance of my seeing a snake—except in pictures with snake charmers, and in the zoo. I believe some kind of aborigines eat certain species of snake, for, once when I was waiting at the apakarchi's stall for some oppers for father, Pushpam, not the Nehemiah

girl, but the one against whom I had reported as not closing her eyes at prayers, and who lived in the same street as we, came running up in excitement asking me to go with her and see a woman eating snakes. She had a basket full of these reptiles I was told, and she took one after another, broke it, as we do French beans, into pieces and ate it up. As father was in a hurry for his coffee, I did not go, but I could see the crowds gathered to witness the extraordinary thing at the junction of our street with Mannady.

Well, the day of father's departure came. He took just a few things for his brief stay and went to catch the tram at Broadway. The same evening we were to have a kootanchore and a stroll into Robinson Park, after the party was over. We borrowed cooking vessels from the kitchen, and mother not only gave us the recipes, but also the ingredients in proper proportions. Davy was chef and Willie and I his assistants. We prepared mutton and potato stew with a generous quantity of cocoanut, a spray of coriander leaf, a little fresh ginger, some green chillies, the juice of a lime and some other condiments. We cooked koota curry—dhall and some vegetable in a lump—and made plantain fritters. Though the last mentioned was slightly burnt, our guests highly appreciated our preparations, the credit of course properly speaking being due to my mother, who had served us with the exact quantities of the dressings.

The bride and bridegroom were a pair of china dolls without free arms, so that when we

dressed them up for the wedding, the man had empty coat sleeves, and the maid was like a swathed pillar, with an English face mounted on the top. We had much ado to make them stand on a table, which was the improvised altar. Standing behind the altar, Davy made a most comical parson and conducted a most original marriage service. It was not the bride and her groom alone who stood on the altar itself, but the whole doll congregation took their seats on that elevated place, a congregation making up a most cosmopolitan and most curious crowd. There were European dolls closing their eyes when put to bed, others which did not; some cheap dolls looking like the carvings on temples, made of cow-dung or clay and painted over; there were other grotesque dolls in a sitting posture and so heavily weighted at the bottom that even if they were made to lie down they would sit bolt upright; there was a small stone pulleyar, or elephant-headed god, and in addition to all these, there were rag dolls manufactured by ourselves, with a bundle for the head, another for the trunk, and arms stretched horizontally from where the neck should have been. The various degrees and kinds of costume and no costume, were not as curious a medley as the company itself. If anything was wanting in the incongruity of the whole scene, we did not fail to make up for it by laying the leaves for the doll guests in the church itself, and serving them the wedding repast. I being the chief waiter dropped a few grains of boiled rice into each leaf before the

dolls, some of which were seated, some, unable to do so, standing with something to support them on their feet, some even lying down, and none able to look at the food meant for them. When it came to serving the sauce, the liquid ran from the leaves on to the table and thence down to the floor.

After our own feasting was over and the guests had departed, Davy who had got fed up with the fun got up and left, followed by Willie leaving me to struggle all alone with putting away the things and to tidy up the place, but since we had invited our servant Chayamma to the feast, —not Thayee, the one we had when Willie was a baby—the kind creature relieved me of much of the trouble. We were now ready for Robinson Park, but Davy took us to Loane Square instead, and before we had time to think of how to spend our time there, he had pulled off a hollyhock by the roots and darted out with it from the opposite gate, leaving us to our own devices. While Willie and I were making for home disconsolately, we were arrested by a strange incident. Dakshinamurty, one of father's private pupils and the son of a Natukotai Chetty, passed us on his cycle with a kindly smile for a greeting. As he dressed himself in European clothes, I used to admire him, having no liking for the Indian costume, where men were concerned. Besides, cycles being rare even in Madras at this time, every cyclist was a sort of a hero for me. Hardly had Dakshinamurty passed us by, before a white man, European or Eurasian, came up on a cycle too, and rode at breakneck speed with set

face and tense muscles. When he approached Dakshinamurty, the other started putting more energy into his pedalling, to keep his distance ahead of his rival, but the Firinghee chap, as soon as he had managed to come abreast of the Native, with a blow pushed Dakshinamurty down with his machine and was off.

This was the first of many instances I have seen of Europeans or Anglo-Indians, racing an Indian on a bike or in a jutka or car, exhibiting their malice in a most insulting way and meanly taking any unfair advantage over the latter. Not long ago I came across one or two reports published in the *Hindu* paper, of a soldier chap wantonly setting a savage dog against the pedestrians on the Marina, and no action taken by the authorities, when the writer, one of the victims, made a complaint. For the annoyed pedestrians to punish the beast the savage master had to be reckoned with. Such things usually ended in favour of the Europeans, whether military men or civilians since anything in the tense political atmosphere can be wantonly misrepresented as rioting. Perhaps, King Edward VII only knew, that in India the people were rebelling and shouting "Vande materam",—hail to the Motherland—but what lay at the back of it all, he could never have known. The injustice to which the people of India have been subjected, perhaps, had no official recognition and the Crown was kept in absolute ignorance.

Well, for some reason that I cannot explain, perhaps, it was the first sign of a fast approaching

womanhood, I felt Dakshinamurty's wrong to be my own. I had always felt attracted towards him, and just at present found myself comparing Davy unfavourably with this handsome youth. His pose, his gait, his smile and everything about him seemed to me objects for emulation—all at a time, when I was utterly unconscious of the natural law of the mutual attraction of opposite poles. I do not know, if I would have so worshipped Dakshinamurty, if I had been a boy too. But he always had a charming smile for me and I gave him one in return. Without understanding the serious way in which such an act might be construed, I used to send him a spray of jasmynes or a tube-rose with Willie and he used to wear them in his button-hole. What a childish romance and how I smile at myself now!

That evening, the Dewan came later than his wont. So far, his practice had been to stop the carriage and alight at the end of the street and come walking the rest of the way. On this day, the carriage drove up to our door and instead of waiting for him till his return, drove off, a circumstance which made the children try many a conjecture. Darkness had fallen, and still no sign either of the return of the coach or of the Dewan's departure. On the other hand he had divested himself of his outdoor garments and was clad in his home dress, looking as if he had no intention of leaving that night. Whispers went round thickly among us, and at last when we were hungry and mother seemed to

have forgotten to give us our supper, Davy made signals to her to come. Then he took her aside and asked, when the visitor would leave, as we wanted our food. She was quite wild at the words and burst out looking at me: "What is this big donkey of a girl doing? Almost a woman, can't you serve the supper to your brothers? When are you going to learn household work?" Then turning to Davy: "The Dewan is not leaving to-night. Your wretch of a father has abandoned us all to our fate without an adult male member in the house, at a season when burglars are so active in the neighbourhood. He has generously proposed to stop here to-night."

My mother gave us our supper and served her infamous lover the refreshments she had got ready for him. After we all had eaten, she put Willie to bed asking me to keep him company and told Davy to go upstairs and sleep in father's room. This he absolutely refused to do expressing his fear of a visit from Lynnesdale's ghost, Lynnesdale being some poor young English chap who had recently died of dysentery, soon after his arrival from England to join his appointment in India. Unable to overcome her son's reluctance, my mother arranged the room for the Dewan himself, and told us she would go upstairs to have a little conversation with the visitor.

After keeping awake for a long time brooding over my mother's conduct, I fell into a deep sleep, Davy still kept going stealthily towards the stair-case every now and then, listening for the sounds of their conversation, or creeping up a

few steps and coming back with a frowning face. When I woke up, rather before dawn, I was surprised to find my mother seated at my foot on the mat, toying with her toe rings. Though she tried to smile and make light of what had happened, she looked the very incarnation of guilt, as she was explaining away the situation to an incredulous Davy, with some plausible story that she could invent on the spot, a story which no one believed. My heart sank within me when I became conscious of the truth, that my father was even then in the house, in his room upstairs and that the Dewan had taken to his heels. In time information was not wanting as to how, father's journey to Sunderkote was only a ruse to trap the guilty pair, and his plan had only too well succeeded. The next day the whole neighbourhood was talking of the incident, and the sight of one of us was enough to make groups of two or three in whatever manner engaged, to pause, and start whispering with significant glances at us. I have no knowledge of what exactly had happened, when father with the connivance and permission of the next house people, vaulted over the small parapet from their side of the house and entered his room. But I still wonder at the wronged man's extraordinary and god-like self-possession, that the vile beast had escaped without a dagger in his heart.

Thereafter my mother would seldom come out of the kitchen or show her face to father, and it was we who had to serve him his meals

and attend on him for everything. This was the home where the beautiful motto: "Christ is the Head of this house," hung so conspicuously on the wall. Miss Bedford, you can imagine what inward fear and torture we suffered, always dreading as to what may happen next!

My father withdrew Emmie from college and kept her at home to watch my mother's doings. He made each of the children swear a solemn oath to report to him at once, if the wicked fellow crossed our threshold again, or my mother met him elsewhere. We swore—and broke our oath. The sinner renewed his evil visits and my mother, unashamed, welcomed him as usual, the neighbours being one and all on the look-out. What did she care? She had killed every refined sense in herself. We were very unhappy, being always in the position of a traitor either to the one parent or the other. My mother used to say, that my father was a brute, and he hated the Dewan out of sheer malice and spite, because of the latter's position, and that on the night that he had returned home without ever travelling, her hero would have blown out my father's brains, had he but had his revolver about his person, and that we had better beware of the fact if we ever gave him out. As for herself, if her children were so ungrateful to a loving mother, she would leave us all and go away with her friend. Under threats like these, fear for the life of the father whom we really could not bear to lose in spite of his dictatorial and domineering ways, every one of us began to tell lies, even

when put on oath, lies begetting more lies, when cross-questioned.

My mother grew more and more reckless. How she could look the neighbours in the face, and hold her usual gossip with her cronies, is known only to herself. As for Davy, he got plucked in his examinations and probably, his numerous debts also came to father's notice. Worst of all things, not content to wreck his own morals, he was perverting Harry who became his henchman, in every transgression. As a punishment father withdrew Davy from Christian College, and sent him, I believe, to the Wesleyan Boarding School at Royapettah to serve his sentence there as a boarder, till he behaved better and obtained promotion to the next higher form. Harry, he had sent by himself to Sunderkote to read there.

Many things happened in that eventful year. The Dewan continued his visits unabashed. The moment he alighted, mother sent away Emmie to take Willie and me for a drive wherever we pleased, in her lover's carriage, and though we were sick at heart at the foul fiend's continuous mischief, we loved to go out sightseeing, and felt very grand too riding in a coach. Emmie had taken an unreasonable fancy to the Botanical Gardens and soon that was the only place where she cared to take us to. There she would leave me in the carriage in charge of the youngster, and saunter off with the driver into the depths of the woods and disappear for about half an hour after which both turned up, and we drove back home. It was no fun for me going to the

same place every time and having to stay behind in the carriage, while Emmie had her stroll. I was then in my twelfth year, and with the tragic events going on in the house, I did not like Emmie's behaviour, but she used to tell me that the driver had volumes of news to give about the Dewan, which he did not like to say before children, but that she would enlighten us all, after our brothers and sisters all came home.

One evening after we had returned from our drive, we were doing something upstairs, while the Dewan, about to depart, was talking to mother downstairs. Presently we thought we heard father's footstep and voice, and before we had time to guess that he must have returned before his usual hour, there was a rapid, thud, thud, thud of bare feet rushing upstairs, followed closely by shod feet. Before our dazed eyes flew the heroic figure of the Dewan, who most unheroically making straight for the parapet, vaulted over it like lightning, and passing in front of the bewildered eyes of the staggered neighbours made his escape from the house. Mr. Siromani, the successor of Mr. Gershom in the upstairs room of the other house, was standing moonstruck at the entrance to his apartment, staring at my father, who was beside himself with rage. My father explained to him the nature of the fugitive's visit and gave out the whole history, for once forgetting that we were listening. If my mother hated him before, I do not know, by what name to call her feelings against him now. "What business had the scoundrel to humiliate me before

neighbours and strangers like that?" she cried in a passion, stamping the ground with her foot, as if the strangers had no eyes to see the villain calling daily during the master's absence, the children all leaving the house as he stepped in, and the mistress shutting herself in with a strange man. She had no shame for what she was doing, but burned with anger because a much wronged husband had proclaimed her guilt from a tortured heart to those who knew it already. Where was the mother's love when she was deliberately, wantonly, exposing every one of her children to the cruel taunts, mockery and calumny of the world? Everywhere we had to face questions, which we could not answer and those who did not question us, started whispering and laughing at the sight of us. If one of us ventured to tell her that people were laughing at us, she would treat it with the utmost levity, lightly remarking: "Let them laugh and expose their own teeth!" My God, what a time, in our growing years, we had!

This was the second occasion, to my knowledge, that my father had caught the guilty lover. That evening, he locked himself with my mother in a room and began banging her so frightfully, that her shrieks and our screams brought the neighbours to interfere and pacify my father. The younger men were wrath with him for assaulting a woman, while the older folks, men and women, began to advise my mother and tried to reconcile the two. My father replied, that there was not the slightest intention on her part to lead a respectable life and told her to leave

his protection if she could not give up her beast, and she returned in a haughty tone that she was ready to step out of his accursed house that very moment, and that he had no right to lift his hand against her. I wonder, why children should be born in such unholy houses. Who can understand the writhing torture of our hearts?

Pacified by the interference of the elderly people, my father refrained from extreme measures and gave her another chance to mend. But she was not the sort to feel shame or sorrow for anything that she had done; no, not even out of pity for the offspring of her womb, whom she was branding with the stigma of her guilt for ever. She had no feelings but inexpressible hatred for my father, a hatred which she did not scruple to vent on our own heads—if we but took his part or criticised her actions. Her only concern was to see that we ate well and were healthy, no matter even if our souls were to be damned. When she chid us for lies, disobedience, neglecting our lessons and such faults, we really had no respect for her. She had forfeited it. Only her threats to leave us, affected us.

During these troubles, Davy one night, suddenly came home, running away from the boarding. He complained that he could not stand the food given there, a point where he could always secure my mother's sympathy, but my father replied, that a boarding house where curry and rice were given to the boys was a place of

luxury compared to the boarding school where he himself had lived all his school-boy days, getting only cholam porridge for every meal except supper, and that if Davy did not behave well during the year of his probation, he would have to do the rest of his school career in a boarding. The next morning, the warden came in a terrible fright to report Davy's disappearance and to enquire if he had arrived at home. Davy led him a hot chase, running from pillar to post, hiding behind doors, and even in the lavatory, eluding everybody till he was overpowered, lifted off his feet, and placed in a waiting jutka between the warden and father and conveyed away weeping and whimpering like a woman.

It was not long after this incident, that my mother's sharp eyes and shrewd sense, detecting some suspicious signs in Emmie, began watching the daughter carefully till she was convinced that the girl was about to become a mother. I knew nothing about it at the time, except that both parents were wildly incensed with her and treated her so roughly that I used to burst into tears and beg them to spare her. The thought that her daughter could never have the chance of making a match, drove the mother mad and she struck Emmie savagely. Emmie was never at a loss for stinging and lacerating words, for she coolly turned round and retorted that she was only walking in her honoured parent's footsteps. My mother, however, was not the one to be nonplussed, for she returned: "Even if a mother sins, she wants her children

to be virtuous. Who asked you to take my conduct for an example and ruin your whole future?" Nothing could at any time beat the manner in which my mother always consoled herself for her own misdeeds and for failing in her duty to exert by her own blameless life a holy influence on the conduct of the children, the shaping of whose characters God had entrusted to her.

It was not long, before I came to understand, that Emmie had fallen even lower than her mother, if there can be differences in degree in sins of the same kind, and that her lonely walks in the Botanical Gardens accounted for her condition now. A girl with her education to stoop so low as to compromise herself with a boor, a servant, seems unnatural; but she was of an age, when, perhaps, she could not stand the things that were going on at home, without being so seriously affected as to deaden whatever sense of refinement there was in her. The girl's position was different from her mother's. Her life was now for ever blighted. For the rest of us, it was no longer, Home Sweet Home, but a brothel.

Aunt Krupa, who had never cared for mission service, or to work in the parts where her family were known as upstarts, had taken up an appointment in the medical service of a certain Indian State. She had always been very fond of Emmie, who being only a few years her junior, was more like a sister than a niece to her. They had played together as children at Sunderkote, and later on were at Northwick together. Hence she now offered a refuge for her unfortunate

niece, and consequently, Emmie was packed off to her. There it was given out that Emmie was a married cousin who had come for her confinement there as she was an orphan. When the baby came, aunt Krupa used all persuasion and coaxing, warning and threats, for all she was worth, to make Emmie give away the child to be adopted, or to hand her over to an orphanage, but the young mother would not part with the child of her shame, born to a Mohammadan coach driver. What became of Emmie thereafter, I was ignorant of for many a long year. Her name was not to be mentioned in the house.

CHAPTER XXII

AT LONG LAST

WITH Emmie's disgrace came the final crash, the long impending disaster, the break-up of our home. That was the last straw on the camel's back. Father and mother attacked each other more truculently than before, and there was daily turbulence in the house, till our affairs were the talk of the day among the neighbours, friends and relatives. Each parent laid the blame for the children's waywardness on the other in their violent quarrels. My father would stingingly refer to her own way of life with the unkind insinuation that she must have come of a family of public women, to be so utterly deadened to feelings of shame, and my mother not to be beaten would rake up his family history dwelling viciously on the low origin, the meanness, and parsimony of the upstarts and in this mutual mud-slinging transaction, they enlightened the gossips and scandal-mongers with family secrets beyond the expectations of the latter. The advantage being on my father's side, he repeatedly ordered her to leave the house, in that terrible voice and those terrible tones of his, to leave his own protection and avail herself of her paramour's

unless she gave him up once for all and renounced her shameful conduct. He had kept not only his own relatives but even her step-brothers informed of her misbehaviour, and when he told her this, my mother drew herself to her full height, and in a stiffened attitude, replied with a sneer on her lips, expressing the utmost contempt and at the same time making her own face look hideous with passion, that she cared no more for the displeasure of her brothers than for his own, and that she was not the one to let any man or woman stand between her friend and herself. There was but one course for her in this hardened attitude, and that was to leave the house—and leave she did, deserting not only the man under whose shadow alone she could hope for respectability, but even her children as well. She had insisted on taking me, and my father had answered her by packing me off to Sunderkote.

I had so often spent a holiday with my grandparents, that Sunderkote was like a second home to me, and glad was I to escape the domestic turmoils which were telling on my nerves, thinking I could go back at any time I pleased, little guessing that my mother was turning her back on the house and was to be lost to us. Years passed and I saw nothing of my mother, nor even heard of her. Her name was anathema in the house. The awful realization that there was no other refuge for me in the world except under my grandfather's roof, dawned upon me with overwhelming horror, when one day, asking for permission to return to

Madras, aunt Kezia told me, that my brothers were all in the Boarding School and my father was lodging in a small room because my mother had abandoned us all and that we no longer had a home at Madras. The children would all spend their holidays at Sunderkote thereafter. "Where was mother, my mother? Oh, where in all this wide world was she? I want mother. I must go back to her. Take me to her. I am not going to stay here," I cried wringing my hands in the agony of despair. The fact that nobody knew where she had gone, or her subsequent whereabouts drove me raving mad for some days. Though my anguish was not so poignant after that, I became disconsolate and once took seriously ill. Sophie did not seem to be so terribly afflicted by this calamity as I was. My father and brothers often came to us and Mary was soon stopped and kept at home. Perhaps the older folks had news of Emmie's welfare, but I was kept in the dark even with regard to her.

Oh, those terrible years! They are unthinkable. We were more unfortunate than motherless children and none suffered so greatly as Willie, her last child, and I. We dreadfully missed her several acts of tenderness throughout the day, her thoughtfulness about our meals and our comforts. Seeing that father was always tight-fisted, she often deprived herself and gave us the best of what there was. Later on when we had presents from the Dewan, we had better times indulging our youthful fancies in many ways without father's knowledge. Mother was not dead,

but where was she? At first it was feared that Willie would pine and die, but God cares for those who may be forgotten by earthly parents, and the little fellow soon consoled himself, with the friendship of one of uncle Luke's little chaps of his own age.

My uncle Luke's children were no worse than ourselves in being boisterous, noisy and mischievous or to go one step further, in telling lies. But my mother was always blind to her own children's faults, was always on the look-out for the faults of her nephews and nieces, magnified and exaggerated them, and in my aunt's hearing would insultingly order us not to associate with our cousins who were all heading for hopeless ruin. She never had a modicum of consideration for other people's feelings, even when they were her guests, which they were forced to be whenever business brought them to the Metropolis. But the sins of the parents are visited on the children, and so was the law in our case. In our grandfather's house, of course, we went thick with our cousins. Though she was not unkind, my aunt, Mrs. Luke had not forgotten my mother's slight and used to taunt us once in a way, saying that the children of so modest and virtuous a mother should not associate with the cousins and advised us to go back to the atmosphere of holiness which surrounded her. The mockery implied made me realize how much real respectability we had in the world, and later on the deep truths illustrated by the worldly maxim: "People living in glass houses should

not throw stones," and by the yet more telling rebuke: "Thou hypocrite, pull out the beam from thine own eye first, that thou mayst see clearly the mote in thy neighbour's eye," which revealed their significance in a way they might never have done, had our own souls been clean when we found fault with others, talked ill of others and insulted others as if we had a right to do so.

But on the whole, we were treated kindly at Sunderkote. So far as I was concerned, they made an idol of me, and my aunt Kezia, adopting me in a way, began to bring me up with special care. She was a school mistress, and had some achievement to her credit, which was creditable in its own way. She had started her career in a mission school, much against her will, as no municipal school in the provincial towns in those days of orthodoxy would entertain her, seeing that the appointment of a Christian man or woman was the signal for the withdrawal, *en masse* of the pupils. I must confess that my family on my father's side, belonged to the lowest and most abhorred of 'Untouchables' and that my grandfather was the first among his relatives, to have been uplifted by Christian missionaries. As soon as respectability came, it brought with it the money saving instinct and with this, the idea seems to have taken deep roots in their minds, that they should pose as Brahmin converts. In this process, they were at first Nayudus, then Vaisyas and lastly Brahmins but ambition could go no further, when there was no higher class left. Whether others believed them or not; and

while the huts and cottages of Madigapalle—Chuckler Quarter—were full of their relatives, converted or unconverted, they persisted heroically in the path of evolution; not that the Brahmins would admit them into their society or even eat in their company, but it gave us, the pretenders, a sense of satisfaction. Aunt Kezia was the life and soul of this movement and she was equal to any occasion.

The most knotty problem to be solved was the family diet. Caste Hindus abhor beef and pork, having a sort of Mosaic code to distinguish between the clean and the unclean in fish and flesh, whereas Brahmins and Vaisyas—in South India—abhor all animal food, clean or unclean. The 'untouchables', considered unclean among humans, fed chiefly on unclean food, dead cattle, sheep and birds and the parts thrown away from clean beasts and birds. Having acquired a taste for this kind of food for thousands of years, it is not an easy matter to give it up in a single generation, though creatures, not slaughtered or killed would be avoided on hygienic grounds. But the trouble was how to appear as Brahmin converts without giving up animal food which they could not abandon. Aunt Kezia, ever a genius in solving such problems, at least to her own satisfaction, cut the Gordian Knot. There was no sacrifice whatever to be made; we could indulge in flesh food as much as we liked in the privacy of our innermost rooms; but only tell others and especially our Brahmin friends, that we were vegetarians, thus singing

a lullaby to conscience. The inconsistency of such a position demanded a severe training almost amounting to military discipline. The most determined and ambitious members dragged in the lukewarm into the scheme, till at Sunderkote we were all for declaring that we were just as good vegetarians as our fathers before their conversion were, which was true indeed in an ironical sense, because our diet whatever it might have been before, had not really changed.

When we came upon the scene we had achieved our highest ambition of posing as Brahmin converts, the fact of my youngest uncle having married a true Brahmin girl strengthening our position, which we considered essential for our reputation in the still unshaken orthodoxy of the pre-War days. India now, passing through a glorious Renaissance with the old values giving way to new and nobler ideals, might soon cease to remember the octopus-like hold which the caste system had laid on the land for ages, and the way how some were treated like servants and some like lepers, while even a beggar of the Brahmin caste held a sacred position in the eyes of society, and could 'thou' the very man giving him a dole if the other happened to belong to a lower caste.

We tore the meat from the bone with our teeth and mockingly called the 'Christians'—by which we meant the lowly converts—'the bone-crunching lot' just as South Indian Brahmins do with contempt; I say, South Indian,

because in the great continent of North India, the Brahmins are flesh and fish eaters, while the 'Sudras' all over the country, in all its length and breadth do the same, so that it seems very like malice that the South Indian Brahmin should designate only the Christian by that dirty appellation. Be that as it may, coming from our lips it was dirtier still. Aunt Kezia made a list of nicknames under which the articles of our non-vegetarian diet should be understood by ourselves, so that we could, if necessary, discuss them freely before our Hindu friends. Thus fish was 'dwarfpodala' or snake gourd; lobster, 'circular bean'; mutton, beef or pork, 'savoury pagoda'—a kind of spiced sweetmeat, made with small lumps of dhal paste and fried in ghee or oil—and chicken, 'delicious yam', and so on, though what our friends when they occasionally heard these names thought of the adjectives we used before the names of familiar vegetables and sweets, I would have liked to know.

Besides, I wonder whether all this camouflage really served its purpose, for however guarded we might have been in cooking a non-vegetarian dish, the odour should have given us out. Granting, that we usually received our visitors in one of the new buildings, not infrequently some imp of a child would burst upon the scene sucking a marrow bone or eating a bit of fish. Last but not least, who could rely on servants keeping our secrets? I have plenty of experience of ayahs and maids in George Town enacting farces behind the backs of their masters and

mistresses, for the benefit of their gossiping friends everywhere. Servants, in fact are unpaid and voluntary distributors of sensational news. I am sure that our Nagi, not only discussed our hypocrisy behind our backs perhaps staging a show of aunt Kezia's character, but even made exhibitions of our purchases to her special chums till she came within sight of the gate, when she would sham extraordinary caution, in concealing the contents of her bazaar basket. She was put on oath and asked to declare solemnly that she would stick to the family Lie in all sincerity and honesty, and she swore without the least compunction that she was really and truly telling lies. Aunt Kezia should have known that all vegetarians fetch their purchases openly and not in closely woven and tightly closed baskets, but she winked at it and winked at several other ways in which our fraud was being exposed, thinking like the proverbial ostrich that if she covered her own eyes none else could see.

At this time, with so many underlings as the farm-labourers, cart-drivers, store boys and cattle-keepers hanging about us for orders and for receiving their wages, my uncles and aunts put on insufferable airs and made themselves perfectly detestable to the poorer relatives and neighbours, giving them all the more incentive to be viciously inquisitive into our private doings, a cause in which they were well served by partisans from among our own hired workers, who were familiar with our ins and outs. The outcome of treating other Christians as inferior to us, was that though

outwardly friendly and in their own interests even humble before us, they left no stone unturned to enlighten everybody who came into contact with them, with the nature of our aristocracy, before my grandfather's conversion and during the period when the parents and sons and daughters were labourers, on their own acre, doing spade work to build up the fortune which had now turned their heads. Malice could stop at nothing, but fortified by their present status, my people never outwardly cared for those things, though there was a great deal of heart-burning on account of the fact that the past could not be buried for ever, but must raise its ugly head and mock them now and then.

Years of painful perseverance in the Lie, and the slowly relaxing attitude of enlightened Brahmins towards Christians, finally opened the doors of a municipal school to my aunt and foster-mother Kezia, and straightway, she became a Brahmin among Brahmins. Painting the face and limbs yellow with saffron and pencilling the eyelids with kohl is an immemorial Indian custom, part of the very religion of all the castes and no-castes in my country. Conversion to Christianity has not changed this custom except in the case of the moderns. My aunts had always used saffron paste and kohl for their toilet, but now, the most indomitable of them all, aunt Kezia, took to the exclusive Brahmin style of wearing her saree, a thing fortunately not copied by the other ladies who considered her too far gone in snobbery for their tastes. The next step was to have the

tilakam, a dot between the eyebrows, till recently abhorred by Protestant Christians, as the 'mark of the beast', but now adopted by an increasing if still negligible number, of Christian women, either, as they explain it from an æsthetic point of view or from the anxiety to identify themselves with Hindus. Her parents protested against this but my aunt, who never had a personal religion of any sort persisted in her eccentricities. She superciliously avoided associating with Christian acquaintances and was for ever running after Brahmins, in whose company, however, an inner sense of her own inferiority, gave her the attitude of a sycophant.

She made much of her Brahmin pupils, and being the terrible gossip that she was, most of her teaching time was spent in enquiries of the most private nature, regarding each girl's family and talking about folks who perhaps never even knew she existed, to all her friends. She discussed with the girls matters of food, always identifying herself with Brahmins in the way she spoke. "We prepare it this way," I have heard her say, "but the Sudras make a mess of it." Again, "We understand what it is to cook in ghee and use asafoetida; the Sudras can't afford to use ghee so freely, and asafoetida they simply can't stand. As for Christians, what do the bone-crunching lot know about the merits and savouriness of vegetarian dishes?" and she would laugh. That was her usual strain. She invited the Brahmin girls to come and play with us and in those days, when to accept a biscuit from our

hands was pollution, they enjoyed plucking and eating the gooseberries, or bringing down jamoons and ripe tamarind pods from our trees.

Wherever she went, aunt used to take me with her, and I would observe how she and her friends behaved towards each other when she called on them. We were not taken into the inner apartments as caste people would be. We were given seats either on the outer verandah or the room into which the front door opened and which we usually call a hall. There would be genuinely sympathetic enquiries as to each other's welfare and intimate conversation about family affairs, but one never failed to observe that the Christian visitors had a mat to themselves which the hostess would not share, however roomy it might have been. Then again in the conversation aunty would use the second person to include her Brahmin friends in any general conduct she mentioned, while her friends would pointedly remark, as: "You Christians; we Brahmins," and so forth. And yet she would not cease trying to make herself one with the Brahmins, undaunted, unabashed. Her spinsterhood was the one thing that rankled sore in her heart, for the Brahmin ladies would stare and gasp at a woman remaining unmarried after childhood had passed and my aunt was over forty, when I became her foster-child. They would even look significantly at each other, and smile and shake their heads when they were told that I, then in my thirteenth year, was still unmarried, for their girls were all married while they were still under ten.

My aunt's maidenhood was the only unconquerable hindrance to complete evolution, though even if she had been a wife or a widow, she would have received no more privileges. My aunt Ambuja was a real Brahmin by blood, but it was all one to them, to whom she was all the same an Untouchable because of her religion. Except in remote villages, where the stronghold of orthodoxy keeps its ground, this state of affairs is now rapidly dying out, and will soon be in the limbo of forgotten things. One is staggered at the tremendous changes sweeping over India in one generation, consigning to the muck heap the sacred customs, the time-honoured systems, which had endured from the age that the Aryan invaders had introduced caste, which had held the motherland in a relentless grip till a breath of new life suddenly touching and waking her sons and daughters, the face of the whole country is being transformed almost in the twinkling of an eye. What though the millions of ignorant and uneducated people still cling tenaciously to the meaningless, childish or cruel customs of immemorial antiquity, the leaders, the educated Brahmins are up in arms against the old monster and nothing can withstand them. Stronghold after stronghold of exclusiveness must crash and everything that divides Indian from Indian, must go. When the present generation with its age-long prejudices passes away, there must succeed one, more relaxed in its attitude towards this levelling influence, and in its turn is bound to produce a new generation wholly free from the

corroding shackles. When I was a school girl I used to hear, that India remained the same in the twentieth century, what it was at the dawn of Aryan history. That was right. But in my own lifetime I have witnessed the beginning of a change which is making up by its intensity, for the inactivity of ages.

While those who were originally responsible for the birth of the caste system were on the war path to demolish relentlessly, the work of their own hands, my people who never had any caste, were going for it now. Aunt Kezia, champion of the movement, appeared only at church without her dot, but she waddled in, dressed in her Brahmin style which exposed the robust calves of her legs and showed the anklets on her creasy ankles, to advantage.

The front seat was our family monopoly, though extra members overflowed into the back benches. Our arrival never failed to raise a mild wave of sensation, when a whole gang of us forming nearly half the congregation entered the church in the middle of the service, dressed in grand clothes, and progressing towards our seats with self-important airs, disturbing the solemn atmosphere. We women felt conscious of being observed, with what feelings by men we were not quite sure, but with jealousy and envy by the fair sex. It seems unpardonable, that we should always be unpunctual, especially when we lived exactly opposite and had but to cut across the road. But so it was for numerous reasons, in a house which was more of a hotel

than a home, with not infrequently a dozen and a half grown-ups and more than two dozen children, all waiting their turns at the toilet and chota hazree and in getting ready. The older folks had other things to attend to before starting and could not easily stir out, but once in a week that might have been managed by rising earlier than at other times. We wasted much time on our riggings, having no mind to start unless perfectly satisfied. The men usually departed before we were ready, probably because they were not so fastidious as we were regarding our appearance, or because they were unencumbered with the youngsters and domestic duties. Even then, my married aunts could not all go out at the same time and took chances alternately.

However, at church, we went through the usual process of kneeling, saying prayers with the priest, confessing, responding, rising to sing the hymns and all that mechanical business one sees in the church of England, whether the service is conducted in English or in a vernacular. The small children could not be kept at one place and as men and women usually sit in different sections, the little ones would keep running from one parent to the other or trot off to some other relative or friend. The older boys and girls kept turning their heads to survey whatever they liked or to keep kicking their legs. The grown-ups behaved with more decorum, giving only glances whenever they were interested in anything which was not part of the service. But the youths and maids must have been thinking

of each other a great deal during the worship, while women who could not restrain stolen glances must have been equally dividing their attention between devotions and the new faces or new clothes seen. But here must have been a few as there always will be in any church irrespective of man-made creed, who felt the peace and comfort of the presence of God vouchsafed to those who worship Him in their hearts, not only in a particular building, but everywhere, and at any moment.

In spite of our feeling so great, my grandparents still stood in awe of the missionaries and even the senior set of uncles and aunts were not unaffected in their actual presence. The missionary principal, Mr. Gordon, had an only son in England and an only daughter Hilda, a very young girl, in India. Their bungalow being in the church compound, it was just opposite to ours. Hilda used to come running away to our house to play with us, and to fondle my baby cousins, whom she would hug and squeeze and smother with kisses, plainly showing her partiality to the good-looking ones. We loved the child and made much of her when she came. She was a lovely and unassuming creature who looked as if she had to be always led, but proving the contrary in actual practice as she had a way of commanding gracefully and getting what she wanted. This child was very fond of rice though not of curries, which made her sneeze and splutter and choke. She would run to the kitchen, take the snow-white flakes of plain rice and eat it

exclaiming: "How lovely; how soft and nice." My grandmother used to feel very proud of her guest and pile more of the rice into Hilda's saucer to make the child eat her fill and thereby incurring Mrs. Gordon's displeasure. The child's mother tried to explain, that as Hilda was not eating any curries, she was getting no nutrition from the plain rice, and as my grandmother was feeding her to the full, the little girl was not taking her food at home and risking her health. But my grandmother had notions of her own. "The child was fond of rice, how could she be denied such a trifling thing? As for nutrition or no nutrition, it was only white folks and educated people who bothered themselves about it. Were not all rice eaters getting on very well without fads about food?" She thought it was something very grand to take the child's part, when her health was actually at stake, so that Mrs. Gordon had sometimes to speak to her very sharply, and even then my grandmother took it as a compliment to herself, feeling that the missionary lady only protested against the trouble Hilda might be giving.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MUTUAL ADMIRATION SOCIETY

A house full of youngsters of all ages, boisterous, roisterous, call it what you may, must have presented a problem for administration. If the noise, the disorder and the number of complaints that came up for judgment in a day at this tribunal or the other were bad enough, the utmost bewilderment was provided by the question of serving food. It was very difficult to know who had eaten and who had not. I am not referring so much to the older boys and girls in whose ranks I numbered, being in my early teens, but it was those under ten who turned the whole house topsy-turvy. If my aunts had a job to see that we all had our coffee and tea, and dinner and supper all right, they must have been gifted with the patience of the gods, to cope with the endless demands of the small children, who asked for rice whenever they pleased during the intervals between the regular meals. Asking for rice seems to have been their chief recreation whenever they were bored with themselves. Now one, now another, would drop in the whole day long, straight from the garden where they had been playing, rolling about like

kittens and pups, or from the manure heaps where they were feeding or teasing the poultry. I suppose the young scamps had a dozen turns each a day, and the kitchen where they were served, in a hastily snatched up plate, saucer or dish cover was a sight to see, with food scattered everywhere and food left in the plates swarming with flies; for the little knaves were seldom really hungry. They were utterly unscrupulous regarding cleanliness, for with fingers reeking with filth they mixed and ate the rice. Nor was there any endeavour on the part of the kitchen management to insist on sanitary conditions. The water-pots stood in a row, on a bed of wet sand kept moist for the sake of coolness. The lids were trays of basket-make, the same as the plates in which we were served our pancakes with coffee; for in such a large household the crockery was always in danger at our hands. In the kitchen windows and wall-cupboards, one could see heaps of drinking vessels made of enamel or some cheap metal, the mugs and jugs and tumblers, all tumbling over one another in chaos. The cockroaches and crickets and other tribes of darkness and dirt inhabiting the said wall-cupboards and shelves, not only weltered in their own filth, but held sports and excursions in these vessels crawling in and out as they pleased. Directly one of the urchins burst into the kitchen for water, the child seized one of these vessels, dipped it into the nearest pot and drank some of the water, leaving the rest of it in the tumbler, to spill into the

pot at the least jerk of the lid, or another child would come tearing in and without throwing away the previous contents of the tumbler dip it in the pot for a draught.

For all their outward refinement, my grandfather's family had not got over the insanitary habits of their ancestors. Not children only, but the grown-ups as well, spat where they liked, the kitchen being no exception. They blew their noses and wiped their fingers on walls and pillars and the women used their saree ends as kerchiefs, for their own purposes and to wipe the children's noses or mouths, and without washing their hands would resume the dressing of a dish or the serving of food, whichever might have been interrupted. The cook spat in the kitchen, sometimes into the very fire not caring what food-stuffs lay in the way. My grandmother, who had her own special tastes, would now and then insist on cooking her favourite dishes with her own hands, and in her partial blindness, for her cataract was advancing, she often spat into the vessels themselves. As in the olden days she loved to take her meals on the kitchen floor, with a daughter or daughter-in-law, who chose to give her company. Even though there was a ladle in the rice pot, if anybody wanted a second serving, the old lady would leave off eating and without washing her hand coated with the food she was carrying with her fingers to the mouth, she dug into the rice pot and served the rice in the empty plate. After her own meal was over,

smacking her lips and belching loudly, she would wash her hand and mouth in her bowl and trying to throw away the water through the door-way into the yard would sometimes by mistake, throw it into the dishes where curries were still waiting to be served or to be kept for the night. I really could not imagine how the caste girls who entered this house as daughters-in-law, could stand so much abomination, and aunt Ambuja was a Brahmin girl too. No wonder, my mother's bitterness knew no softening at the mention of this house, till the day of her death.

Sophie had long put an end to her studies and spent most of her time as a martyr by her grandfather's side, meekly enduring the trials inflicted by a garrulous and gouty old man, which none of his own children or his other grandchildren could tolerate. She was now very thin and on that account, her head seemed too large for her and her eyes occupied the half of her entire face. To read the scriptures to the old gentleman and to sit in the one armed ancient chair near his bed, with her lace-work in her hands, listening the whole of the livelong day to his sermons, his endless reminiscences, his philosophical ideas, and worse than all, the nerve-racking reiteration, twenty times a day and carried over into the next day, the next and the next *ad infinitum*, in spite of being constantly reminded and assured by the listener that the thing had already been several times repeated, only a soul preparing for its flight to the beyond

could stand. Grand-pa' was a tall spare man, with a Mongolian type of features including the scanty beard, and he had hairy growth in his ears. Nothing could persuade him or grand-ma' to leave the ancient, mud-built shoddy, ill-ventilated, stuffy cottage, which was sacrosanct in their eyes, (and indoors it was always full of smoke). He made one end of the mud hut front-verandah a combined bed and sitting room for himself. Even at a time when he could afford for neatness even if he did not care for luxury, he stuck stubbornly to his stringed charpoy, and his old fashioned pillow, a dirty linen bag stuffed with rags and tied up with a string at the mouth like a sack. He had an unpleasant way of running his skinny, clammy hands with its gnarled and claw-like fingers on the hands and face of everybody whom he wanted to recognise or know; for he was completely blind at this time. The charpoy served him both as bed and chair. The old dear in his shirt and dhoti could be seen sitting on the edge of it with his feet resting on the floor and his back bent, till he was tired, when he would draw up his legs and stretch himself on his bed. He had a bad cough and in an earthen tray at the foot of the cot, wood ashes were kept to receive his expectorations. The old crippled arm-chair was poor Sophie's prison for many a long hour in the day. Whenever grand-pa' wanted a little exercise, he would hobble along with his stick in his hand or with his arm round Sophie's neck and pace to and fro near the pomegranate trees.

Uncle Luke had lost a daughter, his first born child. He had two more girls who were about my own age, the others were all boys. Rani was a year my senior as Kusuma was my junior by the same difference, but I being the tallest and heaviest of the lot, nobody could guess that Rani was older. The two girls were quite charming like their mother, my aunt Balama. They were attending the mission high school for boys with their brothers and some of my uncle Sudarsanarao's children. I was of course the usual show-piece of the family and aunt Kezia's pride. I was rigged out like a milliner's dummy on Sundays; once aunt would try a frock on me overgrown as I was, with all its paraphernalia of shoes and stockings and ribbons; another Sunday, I wore a skirt and blouse; the next saw me at church with a thavani and yet another with a full saree wearing aunt Kezia's gold belt and other jewels. But to school I went in a simpler style with my two cousins in a gaily painted bullock cart which made us feel very grand. We were old enough to be particular about our toilet, and were not unaffected by the attentions we received from the boys. Cherry Blossom powder for the face, kohl for the eyelids and a red or black dot for the forehead were our usual make up. Though Rani and Kusuma were both pretty girls, especially the latter, when I was by, they were rather ignored by our admirers, and Rani who was a bit of a coquet without the least bit of jealousy for me in her precious heart, would look at me and say

scanning my face: "I say, Meena, you attract like a rose." Though I had been used to such compliments, from the remotest time I can remember, new kinds of feelings waking within me, gave me a new meaning of the same.

In the midst of my feelings of triumph and despite everybody's devotion and aunt Kezia's worship, in my heart of hearts I was an exile. I could not reveal my pain even to dear Rani. Whatever my mother might have been, I missed her dreadfully. Many, many were the silent tears I shed, and many and many the agonized supplications I sent up to the throne of Grace, in secret for the restoration of our home. The thing that maddened me beyond endurance was the fact that nothing was known about her, whether she was even dead or alive. Noticing my despondency now and then, aunt Kezia, who had taken it upon herself to make me forget my mother, was heard to remark: "No matter what amount of affection you might lavish on another's child, her thoughts are for her own parents." My cousins who were also my best friends would tell me these things, and I had a terrible struggle not to look ungrateful. I saw my father at least once a month, and I noticed what might be termed a revolution in his attitude towards fashion. He no longer made a fetish of the Western style and was beginning to patronise the simple coat and veshti with a scarf worn pundit fashion, which is the style liked by educated Indian gentlemen in general. I saw too with a breaking heart, his hair turning

grey with alarming rapidity and he himself ageing quite suddenly. Davy also came to spend some of his vacations here, and if there was any change in his attitude towards women, he was more abominable than ever. Even towards Rani and Kusuma, who according to Indian relationship were like his own sisters, his behaviour was revolting and my unfraternal heart always wished him away. In Harry's case, there did not seem to be any encouraging signs of his making the best use of his opportunities. It was seldom that he came out successful at the first chance and usually put in at least two years in every class; Willie attended our school. Mary did not come to Sunderkote for her vacations, while I was there. She spent her mid-summer vacation with aunt Krupa, learning compounding at father's wish and one Christmas she went for an excursion with her school friends.

To my great surprise, I was admitted in the third form. I had only done third class, in the Indian Christian girls' school, but English, the subject that presents the most crucial test for admission in a high school was nothing strange to me seeing that that was the only language in which we all had to converse with father at home, apart from the great amount of desultory reading of books written in English, during my idle days. I suppose a further advantage in my favour was my own height which would have ill-suited, a smaller form or class. Again the standard in English in provincial high schools is as low as the importance attached to it in the

curriculum is high, and I found myself equal to cope even with the sixth form. But my knowledge in other subjects was at the lowest level, and if ever there was a bugbear in my life, it was mathematics. Except the four basic rules, I knew nothing more. Time and work; time and distance; fractions, algebra, bazaar bills, were all so many mazes from which I could never find my way out. Rani, who was my class-mate offered to teach me at home, but I had too great a loathing for figures to try to overcome my helplessness in the arithmetic class. But this was not my chief trouble either. Girls can even now get easy promotions in boys' schools, and in our case uncle Luke was an influential man in Sunderkote and nothing would be difficult to accomplish, but I will tell you from which direction the misfortune came.

I had not only outgrown my childhood, but was also taller than the average girls for my age, so that I looked older than I was. Then I was considered the beauty of the school, and knew that the whole Christian community of Sunderkote paid me the same compliment, and the feminine part of it was never tired of discussing me. When it came to some of the teachers' paying me embarrassing attentions in front of the boys and the other girls, it was indeed a serious matter, and I had to report it at home. There sat a family privy council late into night, and decided to withdraw me from school.

Once more I lapsed into a long period of savagery. It looked as if I was never destined

to be educated, but to idle away my time, nursing my vanity with day dreams. Aunt Sarah, who had finally parted from her Brahmin convert husband, was now in the house, nor maid, nor wife nor widow, and her influence was none of the best for flappers, and particularly for a bundle of vanity like me. Her eyes were always roving for young men and she started a mutual admiration society, the membership being thrown open to all her nieces, Sophie, for whom the world had no attraction excepting. Her own children had all died in infancy and she herself was an awful flirt. The chief activities of the members of this society were to praise each other's beauty and pay compliments, whether any beauty was apparent or only supposed to be latent. Our informal meetings took place on the balcony of the porched house, which was then unoccupied, and from this place we could at once exhibit ourselves as well as watch the passers-by. Every little thing was enough to produce a series of silly giggles, loud enough to attract some object's attention in order that we may tumble over each other in our pretended haste to withdraw from the individual's masculine gaze. We remarked upon this man's gait, that man's mustachios, the way one chap cycled and the jaunty angle at which another guy wore his cap, how spectacles improved this lad's looks, from where the other fellow got such a funny nose and more of such ridiculous nonsense. We tried tricks to draw some one's notice and when we achieved our object, took shy peeps at him and scuttled

behind a wall, whispering and giggling and behaving ourselves like the monkeys I saw in the People's Park. Indeed, I never was doing anything sillier and more clownish than this business all my life. Aunty, middle aged, with at least seventeen years between herself and the oldest of the nieces in the Society, behaving like a giddy young girl, surpassed anything that we youngsters did.

No son or daughter of my grandfather's could be called passable, so far as looks were concerned, and though the sons got their pretty wives because they were men, the aunts got their husbands mainly because of their father's money and matchless diplomacy, in his role of a pastor, though even he could not induce any one to marry poor aunt Kezia, his first born. Aunt Sarah was very plain looking, her only relieving point perhaps being the pair of dimples that played on her cheeks, when she laughed. Far from being attractive herself, she was the foremost to make fun of other people's looks, even when they were quite charming. The whole effect was nothing to her, when she judged people pretty or ugly solely with reference to some defect in one particular feature alone. Her way of mockingly describing a person was to exaggerate the defect as powerfully as she could, by so contorting her own rough features that she looked positively hideous and I used to wish she would show her descriptions facing a mirror. Her chief admirer was Kusuma, who was like a lady-in-waiting to her aunt, did jobs and fagged for her,

dislodged vermin from her hair, dressed it up and brought flowers to deck it. She would sleep in aunty's bed and never shrank to enjoy the coarse jokes and the vulgar talk of the latter. The mischievous monkey would make herself detestable to me by dropping into my hair the lice she picked from her aunt's. Wretched Kusuma! Aunt Sarah was a gourmand and weighing not less than 200 lb. would still crave to eat at all times and had no desire to slim, at the cost of moderation in food. She had a great pleasure in preparing something with mutton or fish solely for the benefit of the members of the M. A. S. so that while we played our tricks we were chewing some juicy bit, at an unearthly hour for refreshments.

Why did I not resign my membership when I was getting sick of the M. A. S? It is difficult to say. Of course, it was not in me to resign the world and be a puritan or ascetic like Sophie, at a time when I was becoming so self-conscious, that even if some one of the opposite sex cast a casual and even unseeing glance at me, I would deeply blush. I liked to be admired and was also in danger of admiring some of the wrong sort. But I heartily despised, words cannot say how I despised, those suitors whom it would have been possible for me to marry; for the only admirers in Sunderkote were low born upstarts—like ourselves no doubt, but not good enough for the show-piece of the family. Added to my own personal sin of despising God's lowly children, my mind was prejudiced and poisoned against

them by the arrogant attitude of the elders, who ought to have taught the young to honour all the children of our Father in heaven. Vain as I was of my comparatively good looks, I was made to entertain ideas vainer still of my own importance, by aunt Kezia's boastful replies to the mediators of some suitor or other that when the applications of big office-wallahs were turned down, it was mere presumption on the part of some mission doctor or teacher to aspire for my hand. As for my aunt Sarah, she made me expect a prince to come for me some day, but now, I count it God's inexplicable mercy that kept either prince or pauper from marrying me. I would not have forgiven myself for the deadly wrong I would have unconsciously done.

Poor aunt Kezia's real ambition was to give me all the advantages of a good education, but she could not bear to send me to a boarding-school. After many consultations a conclusion was arrived at, chiefly between herself and father that the best arrangement would be to send me to uncle Murray's place where they had a good school for girls.

CHAPTER XXIV

SIGRIPORE

UNCLE Murray, alias our old uncle Purushotham was a topee wallah, but since aunt Ambuja wore sarees and not gowns, he was not given the 'European scale' as they might have, considering his Anglicised name and costume. As the 'missis' could never think of a gown, there was stout opposition in the railway colony against allowing a 'native' to occupy the railway quarters meant for the guards. In those days—perhaps now too—there was a sort of colour bar in operation against the 'Native', a sorry imitation of the unnatural and un-Christian Asiatic Exclusion Act by which the 'just and Christian' white men have erected artificial barriers to preserve their racial purity and racial domination. I said, a sorry imitation, for in the railway colony here as in Anglo-Indian colonies everywhere in India colour would be no test at all to distinguish the 'colonist' from the coloured man. Due to this opposition, uncle had taken a rented house close to the railway station. The rather broad front verandah of this house was closed with lattice work with lattice doors which were usually kept shut. This was the improvised sitting room, consisting of a few wall pictures,

and some pieces of furniture, where uncle received his friends. What was really meant for the drawing room, was serving a dozen purposes, since the beds, the dressing table, the baby's crib, the sewing machine, the cycle and many miscellaneous things were packed into it and the atmosphere was always heavily charged with the odour of the bed clothes of the young children. This room opened into the yard across a very small verandah which had the kitchen and the store room at either end. This cramped verandah contained the dining table and three chairs, for uncle Murray and any two of the other members at a time. Often Ratnam, the eldest child and only boy, and Kanthi the eldest girl sat with their father, but they all ate with their fingers just like aunty and me, who sat on the floor on mats or low stools, and there was no waiting by servants for anybody. The babies, Santi and Karuna, had their feed before our meal time, and when we ate they gave us no end of merry diversion with their sweet ways, and made a mess of what we had thrown away from our plates. The big backyard separated from the surrounding waste by a hedge of straggling and broken prickly pear, contained some plantain trees and flame-of-the-forest, the leaf-sheds that served us as a bathing place and other purposes, a cess-pool and a hen-house. The poultry made gardening impossible, though there was enough room to raise a few flowers and vegetables.

Now as for the inmates, excluding Toby the dog, we were seven souls. Aunt Ambuja must

have been only about Emmie's age. She was slim, very active, cheerful, and what for me was more than anything else in the world, sympathetic. She was quite good looking, and the delicate jewels of gold on her person and the pair of silver chains, which conformed to the shape of her ankles became her very well. We were more like sisters than an aunt and niece. She had four children, the eldest, the nine-year old Ratnam, being the only boy and a thoroughly spoilt only boy too. He had a light brown complexion, was very handsome, intelligent, but very mischievous. Next to him came, seven-years-old Kanthi, dark as a Negress and belying her name, and in fact the ugly duckling of the family. She was her brother's chum, a hopeless tom-boy, restless, noisy, boisterous and never happy, except when she was having rough and risky games with her brother. My favourite cousins were the two little darlings, Shanti and Karuna, two and a half and one and a half years old respectively, Shanti, as quiet and gentle as her name indicated, and Karuna, diminutive for her age, but looking indescribably sweet as she pattered about on her tiny little feet, like a walking doll. Both were very interesting, and while Shanti was fairer, Karuna was the livelier and more talkative of the two.

Aunt did all the household work with only a maid-servant to assist her and I used to help her in the cooking. She had a great affection for me, and what a comfort that was at a time, when I was practically an orphan with both

parents alive, cannot be expressed. She had always trusted me, and stood by me, when the first soul-shattering blow of my life fell on me.

What a happy household it was, in spite of the overcrowding, the noise of the children and many other inconveniences! The perfect harmony in the lives of uncle and aunt each generously overlooking any fault or foible of the other, and both anxious for the peace of their home, more than for anything else! Uncle was as undemonstrative in exercising his authority as father was aggressive in proving his; and aunt, as patient and gentle, as mother was rebellious and defiant. The pair were loving partners co-operating sympathetically in a common cause, whereas the other pair had been antagonists determined not to agree in anything. What a contrast, the peace in this house to the daily strife and bickerings there! What a tremendous power is there in the hands of man to make or mar his own domestic happiness! In this house, there was a relaxing of attitude, the altering of a plan to accommodate the feelings of others; in the other, the hardening of the heart, and the determination that what one wanted must be carried out at all costs, even if others had to be sacrificed. No wonder, one home endures, while the other went to pieces.

Uncle Murray's life was far from enviable. He was a hard worked man. Alternately, he had turns of day and night duty, and turns of day or night off. Even when he was off duty, he could not be quite sure of an undisturbed

relaxation. Some guard would suddenly report himself sick, or go on leave, and then he was drafted for relief duty. The call boy, half drowsy himself, came to summon uncle at any time of the night according to the train which he was to work. Sometimes in the day time aunt had to prepare meals in a hurry and pack uncle's breakfast or dinner in a tiffin carrier which would either go along with him, or was sent after him by the next train that left in the same direction. There were plenty of railway workers to do these jobs. But the most vexing, if a little amusing, thing was that sometimes some other guard helped himself to the contents and sent the empty tiffin carrier to uncle for all the trouble that aunt had taken to rush through the cooking, and there were times when the tiffin carrier totally disappeared. I remember how often they used to buy tiffin carriers and how often too unclaimed tiffin carriers were brought. Uncle was not the only victim of such jokes.

We used to get presents of vegetables, fish, fruits and other things including small quantities of provisions, all representing the tolls that small or big traders had to pay on their goods apart from the freight charges. Presents in the shape of money were also got out of the passengers, and I knew how the several grades of railway people make their fortunes. It was downright blackmail on those who carried their baskets or sacks or parcels with them on the train—and a number of such people were given a free lift and pushed

into the third class where the humble passengers who paid their fares had no voice to complain against the fearful overcrowding—and then it was downright burglary, in the case of the commodities which were booked. Ignorant passengers were brow-beaten or given a free trip in exchange for cash. I would have remarked here, that the railway people, in any case in India, were the least scrupulous in blackmailing, brow-beating and exploiting whom they could, had I not seen such things among police wallahs, high and low; lawyers, medical people and even those administering justice and educating the young. It is individuals, who are honourable, upright and disinterested, in any office or profession, and not any particular service by any means. Uncle used to say that the station-master of Sigripore received a monthly salary of Rs. 300, but he made more than that amount every single day, owing to the keen competition among the local merchants of this important commercial centre, who were prepared to pay anything for the reservation of a waggon for their own goods. Then there were the host of others to the lowest underling making their own private profits, each according to his own rank and opportunities. Uncle also used to tell of the crimes perpetrated by railway guards and other railway men against women, if sometimes with their own consent, often against innocent girls and young women.

Whenever uncle was on duty I would make use of the improvised sitting room on the street verandah, rummaging the dusty piles and stacks.

of paper for anything interesting to read. I prepared my lessons there, played with the children and sat and chatted with aunty, as we watched the street sights. On account of the wooden lattice and the curtains, and the distance of the house from the road, we were however not quite visible. I selfishly wished uncle always away, in order to be here, though the children were a nuisance at times. Ratnam and Kanthi never knew how to walk. They were jumping and bouncing and doing gymnastics all the time, or came tearing in like a tornado or like twin tornadoes, upsetting everything. Shanthi and Karuna however were all eyes and all hands. Suddenly a book here would vanish and a pencil there disappear. One had to be unwary, but half a moment, and some article would be gone or ir retrievably damaged. Little eyes were for ever on the look-out and little hands for ever mischievous. They would seize everything that came in their way, openly, without an idea that they should do anything by stealth. They were only kept in check by constant warning signals, and once you were off your guard for a second, the little fingers were at their job again, and you nothing wiser, till the ink splashed on your own dress, or a new book was improved by meaningless drawings, or the babies made themselves hobgoblins. One had to be for ever on the alert no matter if the little ones were for the time out of sight. When and how they toddled in was never known till they upset this thing, pulled into pieces the other and walked off

with a third. They were little vandals, but so sweet and interesting. The little ones were not the only people, interrupting my thorough enjoyment of my retreat. Friends called for uncle, and though I was not a purdah person still Indian girls in my time did not speak to strangers, and so I used to beat a retreat indoors and tell aunty. She too being a young woman, only sent word with the servant or one of the older children that uncle was not at home.

On the opposite side of the road where we lived was the long fence of the station yard stretching along for some three furlongs. The whole day and the whole night long, the sights and sounds of the in-coming and out-going trains, the busy activities of the railway officials and of the swarms of railway workers, the shuntings, the couplings, the whistlings, the puffings and letting off of the steam, the music or the grinding of the wheels on the rails, and a million other things were our portion. In our own line, there were a few houses on the road. It was like a little village, with clumps of ancient tamarind, mango, mimosa and acacia for the most part, with the thatched cottages of the poor nestling under them, a most beautiful sylvan scene opposite a most busy, smoky, noisy centre of transport, and just stepping off a road heavy with vehicular and pedestrian traffic. There were a stall or two in our neighbourhood, and a little farther off a public house. But next to our house on one side was a narrow lane separated by which from ours stood a curious

mud house with a tiled roof, its three rooms and the little yard at the end standing one behind the other in the arrangement of the chambers of a telescope. The little pial in front was closed up with tatties making another small room. Aunt had casually told me something about the tenants during my early days at Sigripore, and she had told me so many things about so many people that not only had the accounts got confused in my mind but I could also scarcely connect anything with any one of them.

Not long after my arrival, when as usual watching with the greatest interest the folks who passed by our house, the sight of a particular group made me catch my breath, and quite excitedly I rushed indoors to summon aunty to see the people. There was a man, dark and not much to see in looks, but dressed in fashionable European style with a walking stick in his hand. His wife was tall, neither slim nor fat, good looking, and dressed in the Parsee style with shoes and stockings on her feet. The thing that was out of keeping with such a costume was the brave array of blazing jewels of a coarse and out-of-date make. There were two young girls with a boy between them in years, and all were handsome. The boy was dressed in a sailor suit, the older girl wore over her skirt and blouse, an apron-like robe called a thavani and the younger wore a frock. All the children had shoes and stockings on like their parents, the girls having fillets to keep the hair in place

and jewels too like their mother. My first impression was that, not far from our own residence some merchant prince or some great officer must be having his palace, and that for the sake of a constitutional he and his family were all taking a walk. Aunt came, looked at their backs, as they had already passed; then she laughed a little to herself and looked at me with twinkling eyes.

"My dear, they are our neighbours next door about whom I told you the other day," she said.

I was moonstruck, but as soon as I could speak I said: "You don't mean that?"

"Of course I do."

"This mean looking mud hovel, aunty, you are not bluffing, surely?"

"I am telling the truth, dearie. Wait till you see them at home."

"But what about the dresses and all that gold? Can people living in a house like that buy such clothes and jewels, or dare to dress up so very grandly?"

"But believe me, such is the fact. Mr. Ephraim gets only forty rupees a month. He is a junior clerk in some office. His wife works in a municipal school, receives twenty-three rupees. The rest is all skilful management, stinting and pinching in the house to make a show outside. Oh, but there are such stories about their niggardliness on everybody's lips. Why, the other day, there was a send off to one of their officers, I believe, and the staff all contributed to give

him a garland and a social. They agreed to pay two annas each and sent the subscription list round, and this man said it seems that he would not contribute two pies because it was an unnecessary expense and that he would have nothing to do with the function.

"But aunty, how can people like to pretend to such an extent when they are aware that every one knows who they are?" I asked.

"It is all one to them. If they parade themselves in gaudy plumes, that alone gives them all the satisfaction in the world. They are incapable of understanding that others only laugh at them, but think every one is spiteful and envies them. That woman has a most dangerous tongue. She spares nobody, and she has a special genius for making stories out of every situation and reading her own filthy mind into motives and events. Always intriguing, always busy with other people's affairs, and always talking scandal, she has a way of setting her friends and neighbours against one another. She always appears to be taking the part of the person, with whom she may be for the time conversing, and as soon as the other's back is turned starts a tale against her to the very next one she meets. She is a terrible mischief maker. She betrays the confidences of her friends to one another, and sometimes if she wants to speak her own mind on any subject, represents her own ideas as expressed by some one else, connected with these misunderstandings, and in the event of her

being confronted with the scapegoat, easily backs out by totally denying what she said, or twisting her words in such a way as to make the meaning harmless. The pity is that this terrible woman is bringing up her God-given innocent children in her own crooked ways."

Here was food for thought. I have seen many women like Mrs. Ephraim, some among my own relations. Their actions are really a curse to the world. If they hear anything bad about anybody, they will not rest content till they have informed the person in question what the antagonist has said, and seen the flames of hatred between the two burst anew. But they behave as if they are innocent and protest against anybody's suggesting that they are responsible for the mischief. "What harm is there? I only spoke the truth. It is the other person's fault for telling me all that." Yes, it is always the 'other' person, for these terrible mischief makers. What necessity is there to go and tell a woman, what her enemy has said about her? Surely the tongue is the deadliest weapon known, when the owner is a lover of strife.

The very same evening, the little girl Miranda—they all had far-fetched and pompous names—brought something in a tray, covered with a demity tray cloth, to aunt. They were a small heap of dough nuts and roly polies with some plantains and a string of jasmine buds. Aunt received the present and sent her thanks. All the while Miranda was watching me, turning

her eyes away, whenever I chanced to look at her. After she left, I asked aunty how such a miserly lot could bring themselves to send presents.

"Oh, they have their own axe to grind," she replied. "This is all in expectation of free lifts in the guard-van for Mr. Ephraim and Curzon—that's the boy—and for the P. T. S. for all, if they have a trip in view. Don't you imagine they are so affectionate to their other friends. They always do things with an eye to business."

I saw more of the Ephraims from that time. Mr. Ephraim at home was a droll looking man, in his shabby Tamil costume, a veshti and a shirt and with his bald head. There were no spectacles either to redeem his looks now. When he went to work, he wore dowdy European clothes, except for the turban. In one hand he held his umbrella and in the other his lunch in a small carrier. The missis and the children were all shabby at home, wearing dirty and worn out clothes. For the supply of water alone they had a servant, not exactly their own, for he was a railway man who with his wife to help him, supplied water to all in our neighbourhood. All other work they did for themselves—not that work is mean or dishonourable, but they behaved as if they were strangers to rough work. Christina, the older girl was very particular about her complexion and skin, so that even if she had only a few yards to walk in the sun she used her parasol, and when sweeping or doing other house work, bandaged her hands with rags to keep

the skin from getting coarse. But her airs in company were insufferable. She pretended as if she were too modest and delicate even to open her lips and say a word, though bearing the reputation in the boys' school, as a quarrelsome person, fighting every other girl reading there and giving no peace to anybody till she was withdrawn and sent to a boarding school.

But at this time the most dangerous member of the whole family was the youngest, the girl Miranda. She was a spy and eavesdropper to gather news for her mother. Silently she would steal up to our gate and lie in wait there bending low, her hands clasping her knees and the girl straining her ears to catch our conversations. If somebody saw her she would immediately retreat, in a way that tried to give the impression that she was only playing hide and seek. Our house having a high basement afforded her facilities to do dirty mean work of watching and listening.

Mrs. Ephraim had some old Karnatic sarees or at least imitation ones which she wore to school and she went walking with shoes and no stockings on her feet and an umbrella for protection against sun and rain. It is only very recently that the majority of people in India have begun to wear sandals, slippers or shoes. In my youthful days, not many men wore them and as for women and children, it was only the very fashionable who had footwear and even here mostly when they went out. The rest all went barefooted, as many do even now, no matter if the pavement

was a burning sheet. There used to be some kind of prejudice against using footwear which fortunately has disappeared now, and women and girls who went in for shoes, unless they lived in the English style, were considered to be very bold or very pretentious. But the Ephraim children would never step out without a pair of even the shabbiest or most ill-fitting pair of sandals or slippers, the boy and the younger girl rigged out like the children of some thoroughly down-and-out English parents. The girls' high school at Sigripore being a comparatively recent affair, the fourth form being opened only that year, Christina had been sent to a girls' boarding school somewhere, but now she had been staying at home without education after her last home-coming.

One day, Mrs. Ephraim called at ours with a Tamil friend, an old woman, dressed like an ayah and looking like a servant. She was the mother of Mr. Gideon, the postal signaller of this place, and she had another son in the war and a third, a ticket collector, in some railway station in the north. The visitor never took her eyes off me from the time she arrived, complimented me for my good looks and again and again wrung her hands expressing the deepest disappointment that she could not have such a charming girl for a daughter-in-law, since I wore a saree whereas 'Charlie' her ticket collector son seemed to be crazy about gowns and had vowed he would never marry one but a missy. Aunty seems to have been outraged by the old woman's

mention of my disqualification, for she came out with: "I do not think my sister-in-law, Keziama would consider a railway ticket collector a suitable party for her adopted child, when she had turned down the applications of high government officers for Meenama's hand. The girl is meant to be educated."

"How far are you going to study?" Mrs. Ephraim asked me aside, and I could detect a pang of bitterness in the question, for no government officer had ever come for her own Christina and there was no hope of educating her either, as the girl was singularly void of brain material.

"I am going to finish my B. A. and if possible my M. A. too," I answered, unabashed for being so positive when I was only in the fourth form. I am not even now a B. A. and how I smile at myself for being so silly! A university education! And after all what is it worth after being acquired? Not worth the paper on which is given diploma. When I heard of aunt Ambuja talking about my disappointed suitors, and being familiar also with the boasts of aunt Kezia, and the high hopes of aunt Sarah, I had no notion that they were all fibs concocted to snub their critical friends, and my pride receiving a further impetus I tilted my nose still more scornfully at my humbler suitors.

The old lady, not to be rebuffed, answered: "My son was not at all pleased to receive me. He says that the people in the colony should not know that he is a native, and that my presence would

ruin his chances of a match and affect the scale of his salary; for you see, he is in the European scale, and if they know he is a native, he will forfeit all the privileges." This she uttered not with any sense of disappointment, at the son's unfilial conduct, but with a glow of pride, suffusing her features at the idea of her 'Charlie's' grandness in being an Anglo-Indian. She continued: "What are gazetted native officers, ma', compared to one who enjoys the privileges of a dorai? It is not every native woman who is lucky to get a missy for a daughter-in-law."

"No, Amma," replied aunty, evidently to annoy her without seeming to do so. "But even if our call boy picks up a little butler English and becomes a topee wallah, there will be some missy of his own rank ready to accept him. When pucca English women marry native men who go abroad, is it a great come down for a Faringhee girl to marry your son?"

After the guests took leave, my aunt gave me the visitor's history. "Her eldest son, Mr. James Gideon, is the telegraphist here. He is a topee wallah, but his wife wears sarees. She is a terrible virago, who treats the poor old mother-in-law shamefully. They have a servant for all the rough work, but this poor thing is virtually an ayah for the children and she has to do all the marketing and whatever other work there is to be done. She had a good for nothing second son, who was recruited to the miners and sappers in the war. She had an

only daughter, a carpenter's wife, but she is now dead. Her son and the widower both stay in Mr. James' house, but they also look like servants. The ticket collector is the old woman's last son, but he refuses to have his mother with him."

CHAPTER XXV

THE TAYLORS

AUNT AMBUJA had told me of a family in the railway colony, which brought old recollections with a rush into my head.

"Mr. Taylor, she said, is an Anglo-Indian, but they say his wife is a native and wears sarrees in her own native place, though here she is a doraisani in gowns. It is said that at first she never could speak English and so would neither go out nor receive Anglo-Indian visitors. Even though she understands English very well now, and can also speak, she is still a very reticent person, and one can't get her to talk much in English. She lives purdah fashion, closing up the open verandahs of her railway quarters with bamboo lattice-work. Only the children come out and play under the trees. But Mrs. Taylor is a very nice person and so also is her husband. They are very great friends to us and we frequently interchange visits. I am taking you to see them this evening.

"Can you give a more detailed description, aunty?" I asked, my conjecture getting strengthened.

"Mr. Taylor is not much to see. He has projecting teeth and a bald patch on the head. He is also very lean, but is always smiling and that is very pleasant to see. His wife is fairer than he, is plump and good looking. She wears pendant ear-rings and chains and bangles. They have five children, the last two being twins. Why do you look so thoughtful?"

I smiled. My lips parted to utter what was in my mind, but I refrained. Not even to this affectionate aunty could I show the burning pain in my heart. But I had not the least doubt as to who the Taylors were. Who could Mrs. Taylor be, but the pretty second daughter of Arokiamma and the murdered Perinayagam? She could be none other than Lurthu Mari.

"Would she recognise me?" I asked myself, several times. She knew all about my mother's infamy, though she might be unaware of Emmie's fall and my mother's final elopement. Could I stand recognition? Several times I consulted the mirror to see whether the passing years fraught with sorrow—years which had changed me from a child to a woman, had taken away every trace of the looks which might betray me. "I do not think it possible," I answered my own queries. "You were then a toddler, when Lurthu Mari saw you. After your parents left her neighbourhood, only her mother used to visit you occasionally, but this girl never came except after her marriage, and then you saw her, but she never saw you. Don't you remember how silly you were in hiding all the time and not coming out even

when mother summoned you so many times? And didn't mother get wild with you after the visitors left, for all the idiotic fuss you made?"

When uncle returned home followed by the box boy, bearing his railway box and tiffin carrier and lantern, I asked him: "Uncle, can people who saw me fifteen years back, recognise me now?" "Even if they had seen you only three or four years back they cannot recognise you now." My face brightened up voluntarily. "Why does it make you so glad?" he asked me. "Because, I can pass for a different person now, if I choose," I replied.

Uncle laughed and went in to have his bath. Aunty took his keys and opened his office box, from which she extracted some sweet limes and a piece of jaggery weighing about two pounds. A little later, a small palm-leaf basket arrived full of fish. At first, these arrivals were mysterious to me, but later on I understood the things happening on railways. Vegetables, fruits and other things, even flowers are either rifled from the parcels in the brake vans or goods trucks; merchants and vendors blackmailed, and bribes received as 'mamools' (customary presents) by way of a toll without intimidation, for considerations of a free lift, or some such advantage. Apart from his salary and mileage, my uncle earned a lot of extra money, by various means, at which railway people are experts. There was one thing for which my uncle discreetly refused to be a party, and that was looting manufactured and other goods, that could be easily identified. Among

his colleagues, there was a Muslim guard, who used to stop at nothing, and stole clothes from bales and dresses from parcels, kerosene and every thing possible, and sold most of the articles in the slums. In spite of his low salary, his women used to wear silks at home. One, Christie, an Anglo-Indian guard, misappropriated a good many pairs of boots, and came to grief on account of one of his accomplices. They were all a sort of shareholders, all except the honourable few, to whom integrity was of greater consequence than wretched gain dishonestly made. From the greatest to the least, all those connected with a particular transaction, got their own proportionate share from the common plunder. The very amani coolies misappropriated from bales and packages, vegetables, fruits, ghee, oil, kerosene and whatever commodities passed through their hands. In the case of Christie, one of the underlings was not satisfied with the reward for his help and his protests were answered with provoking insults. This man reported against Mr. Christie, and when the house was searched the incriminating boots were found, leading to his arrest.

Another kind of blackmail that I saw was the way, the loco-foreman and his clerks exploited the poor people when they came for jobs. Men were anxious to get a place as a fitter cooly, a boiler cleaner, a fireman or any thing, and they were prepared to give bribes to the extent of their means. The candidates sold all the jewellery in the house, mortgaged or sold the

very cottages which sheltered them, in order to raise the bribe, hoping that the clerk would place their applications before the foreman. The clerks received all the bribes promising to each applicant that his own letter would be sent up and the vacant post reserved for him, so that in the end even if one man got the job, the others forfeited the bribe money. Often no vacancy was in actual existence. But what was paid to the clerks was nothing before the sums offered to the foreman.

Once, when I recoiled with horror at the tales of such atrocities, and asked my uncle, why he should not keep himself out of these wicked transactions and enjoy the peace of his own conscience, he was greatly amused at my being a pitiable simpleton, and answered: "Do you think, Meenama, that one man's conscience can put the whole tremendous transaction on an honest basis? Granting that I wash my hands clean of this iniquity, as you are pleased to call it, will that stop the swindling and exploitation? But the thing we dread most is coventry. They would all boycott me. You can't understand what kind of a dog's life the man leads whom the others cut out." Here my uncle instanced the case of one Mr. Manasseh, a 'goody goody' sort of man, who was leading a most miserable kind of existence for the sake of satisfying a conscience. "When you are at Rome, do as the Romans do, else we cannot get on in the world. Even Christ says that we must be as harmless as doves but as wise as serpents," were his concluding remarks.

But were these railway brigands really harmless as doves? Then all thieves, and all deceivers are. We can twist even Christ's words to mean the opposite of what He taught, to justify our own doings, with our consciences bearing loud witness that giving ourselves and not seizing from others is the meaning of the whole Gospel. Yet my uncle never failed to go to Church when he was off duty on a Sunday; he possessed a Bible and was a respectable Christian. When people do not want to give up their easy-going ways for fear of displeasing the world, they will not only find excuses but even justification for all their un-Christian acts, and look for their authority into the Gospel itself. Whenever I mention the frailties of others, my own iniquities rise up like ghosts and point to the darkness in my own heart, saying: "Cast out the beam from your own eyes so that you can see clearly to judge others." My only hope for myself is that I am conscious, painfully, shamefully conscious of my own sins against which with numberless failures and miserable defeats I am carrying on a desperate warfare. But I dread to think of the complacency with which those who are dear to me, view their own questionable conduct and behaviour, never recognizing any of their faults as wrong.

One evening we set out in a jutka, to call on the Taylors. On the way we passed Firdusi Watcha's, a sort of general stores, millinery and fancy goods emporium combined. A black man with a slight stoop at the shoulders, dressed in

European style, stood at the steps puffing at a cigarette and watching the traffic.

"That's Mr. Watcha," my uncle told me.

There are no black or brown Parsees as far as I know. They are all like Europeans in colour and I was astonished at my uncle's information and exclaimed: "So black! Whoever would guess him to be a Parsee chap? I took him for one of these Eurasians."

"My dear, he is neither Parsee nor Eurasian. He is only a Hindu Bunya, and Watcha is not his real name. The firm used to belong to Mr. Firdusi Watcha. Even though it has changed proprietors now, it still goes under the old name and all the railway colony people call this man Mr. Watcha. Very few of his customers know his real name."

I was all eyes when we reached the railway colony, for it was shady with tall green trees, and the lanes were all broad and straight and clean; their red pavement, the overhanging green foliage, the neat houses with their patches of flowers, and the blue sky flecked with snowy clouds, making a picture that entered my very soul. The shallow canals with gently sloping banks, meant for the drainage of rain water as well as the overflow of the water tap, were overgrown with lush grass and green herbage. There were neatly laid paths and lawns with wire fencing everywhere. It was all the English landscape and English scenes one sees in beautiful pictures, standing before us, for rosy cheeked, blue-eyed, golden-haired children were

romping on the grass, sitting in rows on the fence, or swinging on the wires, full of life and animal spirits. Ladies in their beautiful dresses and gentlemen in their evening costumes, could be seen promenading on the walks or sitting among the flowers in front of their houses. Turkey fowls qualifying themselves for the Christmas table, stalked about the lawns, and geese, ducks, guinea fowls, and chickens all wandered at will; dogs played with the children, or chased a kitten or a poultry bird. I was happy to see such a picturesque spot at Sigripore. But then it was set in an unmistakably Indian background, as the servants were all native butlers, ayahs and chokras in Madrased costumes or their own serving uniforms. Some were going with hampers in their hands, some filling their pots at the tap, some wheeling babies in perambulators, or taking them out for walks and a number of them at their work in the houses. The predominant colour was white; but many colonists had creamy or light golden skins, whereas there were quite a number of black and brown colonists too, whose children differed from those of their servants only in dress. One could see guard and fireman and driver on their way to duty, or those relieved returning home.

As we passed the folks taking their evening recreation, the breezes wafted the perfumes of the scents and powders and creams that the beaux and belles of the railway colony had on.

"How pleasant life must be for the people here!" I exclaimed.

"Not so pleasant as you think," my uncle answered.

"Not pleasant?" I gasped.

"Not so pleasant," I said," he replied: "The houses look beautiful and neat, but they are not really comfortable for big families. And then it is not all the people, who are so well off as they appear. Many of them earn well, but the men waste much on drink and the women on clothes. They all run up high bills at Watcha's and that man knows how to seduce them and to make the most out of them. After the bills are paid, there is not much left over for other purposes. These people somehow do not have the idea of trying to make what they have last till the next salary is drawn. Their entertainments and balls and parties, and indulgence in luxuries, exhaust the pay before a fortnight is over, and after that, it is credit at the butcher's, at the baker's and everywhere and most of all at Watcha's. There are a few of the hopeless lot whose debts keep on mounting from month to month. When their purses are full they go in for such things as tinned meats and preserves as if they can't get fresh things here. Babu knows all the people here and as he visits the houses often going round to collect Watcha's dues, he tells us that within the walls many of them do not have any style or grandness at all but live just like us."

My aunt put in: "A number of these whom you see here dress up like this only in the evenings and on Sundays. Some of them do not

even have servants to do the work. They will be in their working clothes and go either barefooted or in slippers. Since they think that only natives ought to do the rough work, they are ashamed to be seen washing or scrubbing or sweeping in their own houses."

The conversation had many interruptions, a bevy of finely dressed dames or a company of whistling, humming and joking young men passed us. At last the jutka pulled up under a mango-tree, and we crossed the culvert and entered the broad and neat walk leading to a house. The house was half hidden behind tall silk cotton trees and guhl mohurs and bananas, under which the children were playing. In a small enclosure I saw a garden of flowers and vegetables in some tasteful arrangement of the beds. One little girl ran into the house to announce our arrival, while the other children stood hesitating whether to approach the party or not. Mr. Taylor, who was lounging lazily on the verandah in an easy chair smoking his cigar, rose and greeted us all with his usual smile. Years had not worked much change in his appearance and with a little hard recollection I could have recognised him anywhere. But he did not know who I was except as Mr. Murray's niece,

"How do you do Mr. Taylor?" my uncle asked.

The other taking off his cigar as he advanced to meet us, with outstretched hands and many a bow to the ladies, replied: "Trying to be good."

I smiled, and when he took my hand, he asked: "And who is this fine young lady?"

"She is Clara, my brother's daughter," answered my uncle. Clara was my other name, which was so little used that very few people knew me by that designation. My uncle and aunt, in sympathetic consideration for my own feelings as well as their own family prestige, introduced me only by my little known name, in order that I might be easily identified. Mr. Taylor conducted us all to his wife and then sat on the verandah talking to my uncle. I found Mrs. Taylor undergone a thorough transformation. She wore a sleeveless gown not much below the knees. Over this she had hastily flung a piece of muslin, to pass for a half saree in our presence. She had a pair of fine gold bangles on each wrist and a delicate chain with a miniature of the Madonna and the Child as a pendant. She looked darker and certainly stouter than when I had seen her last, and not at all tall as I had imagined: for in my childhood she towered over me whereas I was now grown at least five inches taller than she. Nothing was more evident than that from the beginning she had failed to recognise me, although her frequent looks in my direction made my heart go faster now and then. I was a little absent-minded trying to realise that this same memsahib before me was the very Lurdhu Mari, the hazily remembered, shy and modest daughter of the murdered butler, in her plait and tight half bodice and skirt and thavani, the grandchild of the skinny old woman Ayah, who had snatched and flung away from me the dirty marrow bone which she found me sucking. Recollections came

fast and thick, and the thought of my mother overwhelmed me. Where she might be, whether in this world or beyond, I was not aware. Either the older folks themselves were ignorant or they kept their knowledge from me.

"What's the matter with the child?" suddenly asked Mrs. Taylor, who was conversing with my aunt in Tamil quite in the natural way, as if she loved her mother-tongue and did not care to pretend like some. My aunt looked at me questioningly. I bit my lip and with a forced smile answered: "Nothing." "But your eyes are wet?" Mrs. Taylor asked. "I think it was the dust and glare, as we came on the road," I said. That was a lie. Mrs. Taylor looked unconvinced, but she politely refrained from pursuing the subject. My aunt, perhaps, reading into my mind, gave an involuntary sigh and then putting on her cheerfullest expression said:

"Look here child, we don't want to imprison you here, to sit and listen gravely to uninteresting talk. You had better go out and make friends with the kiddies."

My cousins had already joined their friends, and while the boys were climbing trees and fences, or playing hockey with a walking stick and some pebbles, the girls had their doll family about them and were cooking an imaginary dinner over an imaginary fire consisting of three small stones for the stove and chopped dead leaves for the fuel. I did not join the children straight away, for they were so young, and I too old and too big for their company, and further

all gossip and stories had a deep fascination for me, but the suddenness with which the tears had overcome me, made me deem it wiser to leave the older folks and seek the merry company of the youngsters. At first I tried to forget myself by studying the pictures in the frames and the ornaments in the house. In a corner was the family shrine with a table like an altar on which there was a crucifix and some pictures of the passion, while a pair of vestas stood burning before them and a sweet incense pervaded the air. The walls were decorated with frames several of which contained tapestry worked by Mrs. Taylor.

CHAPTER XXVI

STILL OUT

WHEN I had nothing more to see in the house, I strolled into the garden avoiding the verandah where the gentlemen were talking. There were flowering creepers and bushes and trees, which made the little spot a paradise. There were some newly dug plots and in a corner, a manure heap. I heard that Mr. Taylor was an amateur in gardening. Beautiful as the garden was, my eyes travelled farther to the sights and scenes beyond. Everywhere the houses of the colony could be seen all picturesque, and everywhere scenic groups seated leisurely or sauntering here and there. Close to Mr. Taylor's was a house, the back verandah of which was piled with what seemed to be lumber and the unserviceable articles of the house. In the bathroom which stood open, some ewers, tin mugs, an ancient zinc tub and some commode-pans and lids were lying severally about. The ayah or maid, a native servant, was cleaning a meat-safe, and the lady of the house, a fair and portly dame, was squatted on the floor with a winnow in her lap, over which she stooped and cleaned the rice. When she saw me staring

rudely at her, she gave me a sweet smile and nodded her head as if she understood the dignity of labour, and was proud of the work she was doing. My heart was naturally at once drawn to her. Indeed, if all the Anglo-Indians with the Indian blood in their veins had not adopted the false, supercilious attitude of arrogant exclusiveness, it might have turned out to be an inestimable advantage to themselves, to the country and to the government. As it was, their condescending airs, irresponsible conduct and the special privileges they enjoyed in pre-war days made them at first feared and despised, and later hated and despised, and further brought into discredit the administration, which several believed treated these like heirs, and the true sons and daughters of the soil, like children of the bondwoman.

I looked twice across at the smiling woman and it seemed as if she wanted to make friends with me. I walked towards the wire-fencing separating their enclosure from Mr. Taylor's. She put away her work, rose and shook her dress and then advancing towards me came and stood on the other side of the fence.

"How do you do?" she began, "I am Mrs. Sequiera, and you?"

"Miss Prakasarao."

"Miss?"

"Miss Prakasarao."

"I suppose you came to see the Taylors. May be you are related to Mr. Murray?"

"I am his niece."

"Have you been here long? It is dreadful, this war business, isn't it? Everything so dear. No? So many dying every hour. Gone to face God suddenly. Life's so short and we've got to die, some day or other; and see how many are simply godless, behaving as if they will never die or stand before Him some day! Great people, rich people, learned people, they may not even have admission there. (Pointing to the sky) What do you say Miss Pp---Ppp-----?"

"True," I said, but was at a loss what to say next. "What is Mr. Sequiera?"

"Hubby? Dead and gone, poor man. He was a salesman for Addison's, Madras, and used to go on Company's business to England and other places. He always used to tease me. Lionel would say: 'pon my word, Betty girl, I am going to marry a pure English lady in England. That I am, and won't come to you again! 'Go dear,' I would say, 'you don't mean that. When I was teaching in convent and became engaged to you, if I did not write to you a single day, you would send a wire to Papa, asking: 'How is she? You simply tease me now. I won't believe you.' Then he would say: 'Wait, till you see and then you will believe. The girls in England are crazy after chaps from India, and one day you will hear, Lionel Sequiera's married and settled in the home country.' I would cry and then we would make it up." She sighed and looked thoughtful for a while.

"Of what did Mr. Sequiera die?" I asked

"Paralysis, Ma. He was stricken down for six months and then he died. I had only my little Willie left at that time. The others had all died, babies. There, that fellow is my little Willie, a sickly chap, he too." She pointed to a lad of ten sitting astride on the threshold and eating curry and rice from a plate in a precarious state of balance before him. She continued: "Hubby left no provident fund or savings. Mr. Wilkins, a cousin of mine, kindly allowed me to come and stay in his house. I have piece-goods, laces, ribbons, soaps, powders, pins and buttons and other things which young ladies might fancy. You see, " (lowering her voice into a whisper and drawing closer) I get them all cheap from Madras. My cousin and his friends oblige me by bringing small parcels with them on the train as their own private things and I sell them cheaply, three-fourths the price that Watcha charges! I get Minnie, my ayah, to go round in the town and sell these for me. You know dear, I make pickles too, and fruit jam and all sorts of things? I can also make and mend dresses. So, even if the times are bad, God helps a poor widow like me. So says Father Bernardi, a very good man. Ma, I am very glad to have met you. I must be going to put that Willie boy to bed. He has such a nasty cold. Good-bye. If you want any laces or blouse pieces, do not forget me."

I pressed the hand she gave me and watched her walking away in her discoloured and worn out shoes. All the time I was conversing with

Mrs. Sequiera I could see some mischievous boys of the colony, teasing the pony of the jutka which had brought us here and which stood waiting under the mango tree. The driver used bad words and the boys returned the compliment improving it with many "bloody buggers" and "bloody blaggards," but when he tried to prevent the young rascals from shying stones at the animal, the mischievous lot began pelting the driver himself. This terminated our visit for the day.

On our way back, we saw Watcha's brilliantly illuminated and a gramophone entertaining the customers. We got down to make a few purchases. Uncle wanted some neckties, sock suspenders, blanco and some other things and he bought some chocolates for us. We went round to see the goods all displayed in glass cases. There were some Eurasians, men and women, mostly young folks and some children too examining several articles, trying on a hat here and a shoe there and all decently attended to by the establishment. What oblique looks of aspersion the women cast at us I cannot describe, as if our very presence there was intolerable to them. Some brushing rudely past us, never even cared to apologise, and some were vulgar enough to look at us from time to time, talk in whispers and giggle or laugh outright with the clear intention of making us understand that we were furnishing them all that merriment. Young men were buying chocolates, ribbons, and lozenges and presenting them to their sweet-hearts. The

place resounded with their chatter and laughter, as they spoke to one another or accosted the manager. Some women examined every blessed article, the poor clerk or shop assistants taking out everything for their benefit and finally left the shop without purchasing even a packet of hair pins, for all the ado that they had made.

"How do you do, Mr. Barker?" Mr. Watcha greeted a middle-aged, under-sized man, with an extraordinary resemblance to Napoleon I of France, but with a very fair Indian skin. I learnt subsequently that he was the brother of Miss Barker, the headmistress of the railway school and organist in the chapel. He was an unemployed man, doing odd jobs like mending pianos, and other musical instruments, repairing watches and cycles and somehow managing to pull on. As there were few Europeans in Sigripore, except the government officials, and his skill was not so much in demand in the colony itself, he was mainly dependant on his sister for his support, but such was his popularity, that there was not a party or function in the colony where he was not invited and once almost every day he dined out.

"Quite well, thank you," said Buonaparte, "and you?" he asked in his turn as he settled down comfortably at the table opposite to the manager. "Hullo, Mr. Murray, this is your day off, eh?"

"How goes the war, Mr. Barker," asked Mr. Watcha.

"Damn Germans are blowing up our ships and dropping shells on London. But we are

giving the fellers properly. What man, do you think the English will be defeated? That will never be. Britannia rules the waves. Aye, and also, there is justice on our side. We are saying prayers in the church for victory you know? Ask Mr. Murray."

While I was wondering whether the Germans may not be saying prayers for their success too, a fat, squat, swarthy woman came sailing into the shop followed by an ayah and she started making fuss about every thing, and looking at aunty and me as if we had no business to be in the same place as she. "Here, Mr. Watcha," she began in the tone of one much put out, "I want one tin sardines, one tin cherries and one peas! quick please."

"Here, Bhose," Mr. Watcha summoned his senior assistant. "Please attend to Mrs. Brolly."

Mrs. Brolly glared at the handsome Bengali chap, and turning to the manager spoke sharply: "I don't want that native to wait on me. You come along yourself, if you please."

Unwilling to be interrupted in his chat with interesting Mr. Barker, Mr. Watcha got up and obeyed her. Later on I asked my uncle, if she did not know that Mr. Watcha was a native too, and not even fair and handsome like Mr. Bhose. "But Watcha wears European clothes and Bhose doesn't," answered uncle. "That makes the difference, though Mrs. Brolly herself would be a Negress, but for her dress."

After pronouncing everything bad and shocking, Mrs. Brolly in the manner of one doing the

manager a favour by patronising his firm, accepted three tins of the several articles she had called for, her ayah carrying them for her. When Mr. Watcha returned, we left and I had no opportunity to hear more of Mr. Barker's opinions on topics, though he was heard remarking on the merits of tainga chore (cocoanut rice) and grilled fowl eaten together. Some days later, a letter came to my uncle from Mr. Barker and it read as follows :

"Dear Mr. Murray,

I here that in the place of Miss Hopeton an Indian lady is come. I think you may know her, if she has one organ will you please tell her Mr. Barker can repare musikel instramants and has done much expirt work on the west coste Malabar I can give her the highest satisfakshun I hope you and the rest are well. Our boys are going to the training camp.

Yours sinsearly,

B. BARKER."

My uncle asked me to take the letter to my new headmistress, the successor of Miss Hopeton.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE SCHOOL

BY this time, I had been a month at school, and such a small school it was, there being only four girls in the newly opened fourth form, which at the time happened to be the topmost class in the school. But it was known that when we had completed our year's course, we would automatically constitute the fifth form and ultimately the sixth. But as yet, not even a single graduate teacher had been appointed. So long the headmistress had been Miss Hopeton, a Matriculate and an Anglo-Indian, who owned the only ricksha that could be seen in Sigripore and staying with some friends in the railway colony. She used to pass our house every day on her way to school, her face covered with a black wimple dropping from the hat. My uncle used to say for fun, that she veiled her face in order to hide her blackness.

Miss Hopeton was very strict. She would give cuts to the small girls, scoldings to the big ones, and rated the teachers in front of their classes for every trifle. Not a bit of paper should be seen lying anywhere about and not a speck of dust should stand on the furniture, or a cobweb

on the wall or easel. Not only did she make the servants constantly clean and tidy up things, but she would make us take dusters and water and rub the glass panes of bookshelves and museum cases till they shone like crystal. Not only was she incapable of a smile of approbation, but there was always that look in her eye, as if nothing that anybody could say or do was right, and it was her bounden duty to be on the constant look-out, to catch some defaulter and punish her for her own 'good'. Needless to say we all trembled at the sound of her footsteps, but in a sense the school had rare discipline. Her special victim was the drawing-mistress whose work was short of the highest order, and Miss Hopeton had not only possessed some qualifications for drawing herself, but was a real artist. She decorated the office room with her own drawings and there was no end to her fault finding with Mrs. Paranjothi's work.

There was another mistress who came under her withering scorn for a different reason. In those days in the provincial towns, any Christian woman who received a little education in English, felt she must have a badge of distinction, to differentiate her from the rest. She parted her hair to a side while all the world did it in the front in those days, and went in her shoes and stockings, when well-to-do and fashionable dames preferred to have jewels on their feet. A person of School Final attainments being a rare object even at this time in the mofussil towns, such women considered

themselves unique in the whole world. There was a Miss Samuel, not bad looking, in fact being brown skinned, she was fairer than the headmistress herself. She was our history teacher. While others had not as yet in large numbers discarded the plait which was worn over the neck in a coil, held in place either with hairpins or by passing it through a strand of hair, Miss Samuel was one of the fashionable sort, who simply twisted the hair without plaiting it and coiled it up using pins to keep it in place. She wore long sleeved blouses, even elbow length sleeves had not come into vogue here, and sarees with gathers at the back while the less fashionable, however rich or educated, clung to the front gathers. She wore a gold belt, a string of gold coins and a torque round her neck and heavy gold bangles on her wrists, all which jewels the modern Indian woman would consign to the museum. Indian women even starve to save money for a few trinkets, for a woman's prestige corresponds to the weight of gold on her person. That alone is her capital and the family's bank. In post-war times, the refined and educated no longer hold this view and no longer load themselves with jewellery, but the half educated and illiterate women who form the masses, still go in for prestige in jewels. Miss Hopeton insisted on believing that Miss Samuel was very rich and therefore had no need to work for her living, but the great eyesore for her was the teacher's use of shoes and stockings. She could not bear to see Indians wearing these, as she

seems to have considered them the exclusive monopoly of the ruling class—she identified herself with the ruling class. After various futile attempts to make Miss Samuel give up shoes and stockings, Miss Hopeton passed an order that the teacher should not wear high heeled shoes and must have rubbers to avoid noise in walking. I have often noticed when these two were together, how Miss Hopeton used to stare at Miss Samuel's feet mercilessly, calculated to make the other flinch and feel thoroughly uncomfortable.

But there was a certain evil practice going on right under her nose, which with all her argus-eyed vigilance she failed to scent. Miss Samuel, in spite of all her trappings and outward show of refinement, was as mean as she was really vulgar. She used to discuss with us her great popularity in other schools where the pupils hero-worshipped her and brought her presents on all occasions, thereby giving us a hint that we were expected to do the same.

"The girls used to be so fond of me that there was not a function in their houses when they did not invite me and load me with presents. For my birthday they all used to raise subscriptions in order to give me something nice to show their regard. Nothing like that happens in this school. The girls seem to be very unsociable."

When she had said this so shamelessly, I asked her: "Teacher, when do you get your birthday?" Another girl at once invited her to her little brother's cradle ceremony. Hindus have a

grand ceremony before they placed an infant for the first time in its cradle.

Not alone Miss Samuel; I found all the teachers, Christians and Hindus, expecting the school children to supply their daily beedas (pan packets) and gifts of fruit and other things, often forcing the girls to apply to their parents for the money, ostensibly for the purchase of kindergarten material for the girls. This abuse led to bad children using even an honourable and upright teacher's name, to get money out of their parents, whenever they wanted to buy trash for themselves. I was shocked to find likewise that in numerous cases, promotions and detentions were vitally connected with these bribes. Backward pupils would pass and the first mark did not always go by merit. At the time of the annual examinations, the drawers of the teachers would be full of cotton and silk bits for blouses.

It is harrowing to think that teachers, the preceptors of the young, sharing equally with the parents the responsibility of moulding the characters of the young, acting with such abominable meanness, making up for beauty lacking in the soul, by a profusion of jewels and fine dresses. But in those days, when excepting a few driven by misfortune to work for their own living, in a country where it was considered debasing for a woman to leave the seclusion of her own home, a large number of school mistresses were upstarts. Among Christians they generally came from an abject origin, while among Hindus, it was generally those bold ones an

allusion to whom made folks shake their heads and discuss their morals. A great, a miraculous and revolutionary change has come over the face of the country now. The best of the daughters, imbued with the spirit of independence are out to assert their own rights and to earn their own living, but the stigma attached to the respectability of Hindu women who stepped out of the seclusion of their homes in pre-war days however, was perhaps not altogether without justification in a number of cases ; for in such a conservative country, those who defied public opinion must have been of the most reckless type in the majority of cases. Even as late as the second decade of the twentieth century, one could hear, people remark sarcastically, that the government schools exist solely for the benefit of dissolute women and wives who had abandoned their husbands. If a sweeping generalization such as this cannot be wholly true, I can also say, that it was neither wholly false. One has got to deal with elementary school mistresses to see what kind of a life most of them are leading.

Soon after I joined the school a graduate was posted as headmistress, and another to fill in a newly sanctioned post for a newly opened secondary section. The headmistress, Miss Barnabas, was an experienced hand. She was tall, straight as a post, and somewhat masculine in appearance and ways too, with large jaws and large bones. She wore rich Karnatic sarees and blouses with narrow neck and elbow sleeves trimmed with frills or cuffs. Though she

also wore shoes and stockings, her style was one of the simplest with nothing of Miss Samuel's ostentation. She taught us mathematics and though even a look from her filled us with awe, she never scolded even the servants. Her voice was masculine too in the sternness, and that was fairly sufficient for the latter, whereas for the teachers a single glance from her as she took her rounds had more effect than all the nagging of Miss Hopeton. Though her expression was always severe, still she could smile and laugh and enjoy conversation with anybody who dared to go to her. She was always kind in listening to our troubles and giving us advice or help.

But there were folks who disliked Miss Barnabas. One of the old time masters, a veteran in the department, was still kept on. As he had seen many vicissitudes in service, and knew more about the affairs of the school and the temperament of the public of Sigripore than the others, Miss Barnabas used to consult him quite often on these matters and make use of her information in her personal observations. If at all the respect shown for the knowledge and wisdom of an old man, and experienced hand like Mr. Pera Sastry, was an offence, then the individual who should have felt the greatest smart must have been Miss Parsons, the only other graduate and the seniormost colleague of Miss Barnabas. But it was the other mistresses who expressed their resentment and indignation in the very presence of us, school girls. The leader was one Mrs. Ahalya, a Brahmin

widow, who often converted her classes into political meetings, haranguing against the government, and always insulting Christians as a contaminated community, which could claim no particular caste or blood for its source. She likewise never lost an opportunity to advertise the merits and achievements of the several members of her own family. In those days, Brahmin widows were, as it were, the pet children of the government among Indians and they were given the preference in scholarships, educational facilities and government posts, while the more advanced Indian Christians were asked to go and find mission jobs, and it is a strange paradox too, that while these unfavoured Christians were as a community loyal citizens, it was the favoured children who were the worst sedition mongers. Mrs. Ahalya and Miss Barnabas could never tolerate each other.

Miss Parsons was a young Anglo-Indian girl, free, sociable and lovable. She wore only knee length frocks with low necks and short sleeves and was always tripping about like a school or college girl. Her face was always smiles and she chattered and played with us as if we were her equals. She was a favourite with Miss Barnabas and trotted into the office room any time after a tiny tap at the door and the usual 'come in'. She had not yet gone in for a bob and wore her long hair piled up on the top of her head. On her left wrist was a plain silver bangle, and on her bosom hung a short delicate gold chain with a cross. The girls all hero-worshipped

her; for she was so nice, so full of wit and animation which never failed to fascinate the young.

Miss Parsons had friends in the railway colony, but she resided in the town taking a house and keeping a servant. We called on her often, and every time, there was some guest whom she would introduce as, "This is Clifford, my brother", or "This is Lucy, my sister", and often it was "Daddy", who came and spent the week ends with her. I believe that was the reason she did not choose to be a lodger anywhere.

I had a great regret for Miss Parsons for two reasons. The other members of the family whom I had seen, were fair, by which I mean the light yellow colour of the Chinese, while poor Miss Parsons was not only a dark brown, but her face with its irregular features was a heap of freckles. Her eyes twinkled with merriment as she expressed with a laugh that she was the ugly duckling of the family, but I who had a habit of more than superficial observation, would now and then notice the corners of her lips droop for a moment and her breast heave with a suppressed sigh, as if she had felt a sudden stab of pain, for lacking those things in looks, so dear to a woman. Sometimes the way she used to look at me, and the other pretty girls made me feel intuitively, how much she must be wishing that God had given her at least our colour and our features. It required a great amount of penetrative insight to catch her

in her weak moments; for even her closest associates might easily miss the unsatisfied longing in the inmost heart that had cast a gloom over her cheery, genial nature, the sunny laughter and the ready wit that she always summoned to serve her, to make the time pass pleasantly for those in her company. These characteristics might mislead others into thinking that life was a most pleasant pastime for Miss Parsons. She read no end of novels, but it must have tortured her to think that life was without a hope of romance for her.

At school she regarded her work as almost a mission to her from the Highest. I have never known her to stay away save when she was utterly unable to leave her bed. The great interest she took in the subjects she taught aroused ours in response. She took us out for walks and excursions; she taught us to sing and do fancy work and gave us endless conundrums to solve. No wonder, she was the idol of her pupils.

I think the inner gloom in her life had a second cause. For a long time I was under the impression that Miss Parsons had no mother; for her affectionate allusions had all been to 'Daddy', and her brothers and sisters, and never once to 'Mummy'. Once when I expressed my doubt to my aunt, she gave me the revealing explanation that Miss Parsons' mother was a native Madrassese of the servant type, and not an educated or middle class Indian lady. She still wore her clothes and coiffure in the ayah fashion, with the other usual accompaniments, the tattooed skin

the large ear-bores, and the bag with the pan materials. She was more a servant than the mistress of the house and the mother of Mr. Parsons' one dozen children. Mr. Parsons was an A Class guard at the last station, from which uncle had been transferred to Sigripore and there everybody knew that the house-keeper of Mr. Parsons was in fact his wife. In later years, whenever I thought of Mr. Parsons, I used to recollect the Scriptural motto: 'Be not unequally yoked.'

I must now introduce my class-mates to you. There were two Brahmins, a Christian and I, making up a grand total of four. The Christian girl was Santhosam (Joy). She was dark, but had good features, and though inclined to be stout was at this time not awkward. She was an orphan, having lost her father, the late pastor of the place. Her mother was a zenana woman, her step-brother a revenue inspector, and her elder sister a hospital nurse. She could afford to dress well and wear jewellery and her thick hair fell on her back in a heavy plait. She was always smiling as if to justify her name, but though in conversation she was witty, and exhibited a fine capacity for argument, and quarrelling, she seemed to be entirely devoid of brains for studies. Her mother's ambition to educate her highly, forced her to continue at school against her own inclination to fall in love and marry some one. There was at this time a youth studying in the boys' school, who used to run after her bandy and toss love billets into her lap on her way to and back from school.

Of the two Brahmins, one was a Brahmo girl, the youngest in the class. Her father having married a child widow, the family had no social touch with their own community. Sarojini was not only a fair and beautiful girl, but a very clever one too. Her activity bordered on restlessness, and Sarojini was a born actress who could dissemble to perfection and imitate anybody. But she herself used to be as serious as her heart was bubbling over with fun. We always made a trio, Santhosam, Sarojini and I, leaving the last of our class-mates to herself: I shall tell you why.

Padmakshamma was a matronly widow of twenty-four looking older in her widow's weeds of white or red cloth, with the fringe of which she covered her shaven head. From remotest antiquity down to pre-war times it was a social crime and sin for a widow, not to disfigure her own person and even to this day, these wretches doing a lifetime of penance are to be seen in numbers everywhere. Padmakshamma belonged to this conservative set. She still clung to convention and had not only discarded jewels and fine clothes, but till she went in for English education would not tolerate even a half bodice for her bosom. Now that she wore it for decency's sake, she painfully concealed it under the folds of her saree which she swathed round her body in such a way as to leave only the forearms free to move. She kept coldly aloof from us, and looked so severely at the remaining three that it seemed as if all the

time she sat in judgment on us. Later on in one of the big hospitals I was thunderstruck to see this same Padmakshamma with her hair grown and she herself in the regulation costume of a hospital nurse, the gown, the cap and all. She took my prescription to touch my throat and asked me if I remembered her, in beautiful English. Of course none but the gods could have recognised her under such an unthinkable transformation. Padmakshamma too shy even to wear a bodice, the humble conservative widow, now was mistaken for an Anglo-Indian nurse by me. Surely, miracles will never cease.

Just now, Padmakshamma was the best friend of Mrs. Ahalya, and all those who preached Brahmanical superiority. Her struggles to cope with her studies were gallant, seeing that it was only lately that she had begun acquaintance with the English language, with a long break even in her vernacular education, and the subjects presented to her in the fourth form being bewilderingly alien to her. Her unlimited ambition to learn and the utter inadequacy of her previous attainments, made her a pitiable object. The other teachers at least knew her vernacular and explained their lessons in the vernacular sometimes for her sake. But the fiery ordeal for her awaited in the subjects taken by the headmistress and Miss Parsons, who neither of them knew the vernacular. Whenever she bravely tried to express herself in English the stammerings, the stutterings and the vernacular termination given to English words

and sentences, the sentences without finite verbs and what not, were highly entertaining. But she kept up the fight heroically. Being a grown up Brahmin woman, even the teachers who spoke to her in vernacular addressed her in the plural. Even now I cannot bring myself to believe that the staff nurse, the Sister, in that hospital who painted my throat was verily and truly the Padmakshamma of old, though of course the fact is indisputable.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MRS. EPHRAIM'S TURN

○ F those in whose presence I was unaccountably shy, one was Mr. Bhose, the Bengali Accountant at Watcha's. He was very handsome and looked quite grand in his national costume and I did not resent his open admiration for me. But he was a Hindu. Therefore, though as most human beings under those circumstances are, he may be thoughtless, my habit of deep thinking warned me against the danger and I had a good fight about it. His visits invariably produced an old popular song from Ratnam, my cousin. I shall just give it here as he used to sing it with his mistakes, if any :

I very good Bengali Babu
Calcutta a long time stopped,
Ram Chand Chander is my name
In Radha Bazaar I kick (keep) my shop.
Very good Hindu, smokes my hookah
Eats my dhal bhatt every day
And when night comes a plenty poojah
Hear nautchwal and the tom-tom play.
* * * *

Kooch parva nai, good times coming
Sing Britannia rules the waves ;
Jolly good fellow goes home in the morning
Babu, how he can may saves.

Ratnam used to sing : " In Radha Bazaar
I 'kick' my shop." Once he thrust his head

into a large, empty water pot and sang in imitation of a gramophone, when Mr. Bhoose quietly stole up behind and gave the little fellow such a boxing that Ratnam solemnly promised not to sing that again, breaking the promise the moment he was released and was safely out of reach of his enemy.

A year had passed and I was in the fifth form. Some tournaments were to be played at Sigripore, in which, teams of hockey, football, tennis and football players from several parts of South India were to compete. The captain of one of the football teams was Rudran, aunt Ambuja's brother, a B. A. student. The authorities conducting the tournaments had arranged accommodation for all the visiting teams and Rudran used to stay where he was quartered. Our house, too, was much too small for guests, to accommodate even a single extra member. Though the tournaments took place only in the evenings, the manifold duties of the captains, including sightseeing, gave them no respite even to take half a day off. But every day, if not in the morning or noon, at least in the night after the day's tournament was over, Rudran never failed to call on his sister, even for a few minutes. Sometimes he was able to spend some hours.

Rudran was a handsome young guy, dressed in tip-top English style. In my eyes, his good looks were enhanced by the spectacles he wore. In a house like ours, there was no private room where I could withdraw, if strangers called, unless I sat in one of those cramped enclosures, screened

off by an almirah or a bedstead and stinking of babies' bed-clothes. My wretchedness during such a self-inflicted imprisonment could not have been deserved by the worst criminal. Usually, men came for uncle alone, and they sat on in the verandah room and went away without stepping indoors. Rudran as a relative had the freedom of the house. In spite of aunt Ambuja's remarks, that I was just silly to hide myself so, I had not the courage to come out and face the man with whom I had fallen in love at first sight. Rudran seems to have been under the same affliction; for his eyes were constantly searching for me, whether he was chatting with his sister or playing with the children, and my mind told me that he had more than a fraternal interest in calling on his sister, as often as he did. But Rudran was not one who pretended to be serious and reserved in the presence of the girl with whom he was dying to make an acquaintance. He used to take his sister's part in asking me to come and join the family circle, remarking funnily on my unreasonable shyness. He would tell me to leave my snail shell and come out.

So, now and then I used to play bridge and chess with him and my aunt, because he was irresistible. Though even at that early age, I had seen enough of the hideous ugliness of the world, still my predominant idea of life—an idea mainly gathered from romances—was that everything was bound to turn out happy in the end. If a man loved a woman and won her heart,

he would marry her at any cost. King Cophetua, Young Lochinvar, Lady Clare and countless other beautiful stories, what did they all show? How many young people in the world entertain beautiful ideals and soon find them torn and crushed by realities! Sordid, grabbing, coarse minded humanity with a glamour of romance which really existed only in imagination and in legend!

I was forced to be in Rudran's company by external circumstances, and I did not regret that. They were moments of a thrill, a dream, an ecstasy. I forgot my sorrow for my parents, the yearning for my brothers and sisters, scattered far and wide. I forgot my grief for Sophie's rapid decline. I felt that to have Rudran in sight was all that I would care to live for. He was so tender in all that he said and did, with none of the coarse sensual actions that Davy used to display in the company of young girls. He was a very frank, sociable and jovial lad. Sometimes yielding to the rebukes of uncle and aunty, he would make excuses to his friends and come to have his dinner here.

The football tournaments had ended with victory for Rudran's team in the finals. The day had come for his departure. I could only feign a headache for the pain that was gnawing at my heart and kept to my bed the whole day long. My uncle had gone in charge of a train, and was not expected to return till the next morning. Some hours after the train that was to carry off Rudran's team had left, my aunt went to call on a neighbour, taking Shanti and Karuna

with her. She tried to coax me to come out and take a little fresh air which would do me good, but feeling too much crushed at heart, I longed to be left quiet and forgotten where I was and made some excuses for staying away. Only Ratnam and Kanthi were at home, for even the servant had gone to the market.

Then, it was no hallucination, no illusion of a self-deceived mind, but there in flesh and blood before me stood my beloved Rudran. I only knew that he looked haggard and I was trembling all over. He spoke some sentences very rapidly; what he said, I cannot recollect, but the world had melted away from my consciousness. How long we conversed, I cannot tell. He took me into his arms and strained me to his bosom. I did not think it wrong, for all the novels written by the best men and women, taught me that there was nothing wrong in two lovers plighting their troth with a kiss or embrace. There was nothing secret either. For all I knew, Ratnam and Kanthi might be looking on. But there was a terrible danger. If Rudran forgot himself?

I was rudely awakened from the stupor in which I had lost myself for a second, by the appearance of a sinister form at the door-way. It was Mrs. Ephraim—Mrs. Ephraim, who inwardly hated me for being a more costly object than her own daughter, in the marriage market, the fatal result of aunt Ambuja's exaggeration. Everything that immediately followed is a perfect blank in my memory. I have never dared to recall the events,

and they are best forgotten. Mrs. Ephraim, always on the look-out for the least trifle to create a scandal about anybody, had made this intrusion out of spite and malice. Although, she had inflicted on my life, all the bitterness that concentrated venom and hate could inflict, which no subsequent regret, if any at all, could ever undo, and left me a wreck on the ocean of life, yet after the lapse of so many years, I cannot help but feel, that her sudden appearance on the scene, at the right moment, might have averted a still greater calamity. God's ways are inscrutable, but ultimately we are convinced that they are the best.

How I happened to be so helpless as to let a man fold me to his bosom, I cannot say. Perhaps, the sudden joy at his unexpected appearance, when I was sinking in despair, gave me no opportunity or time to assert myself. Had I but had the slightest notion that Rudran, after pretending to be off, would part from his team, as the train began to move, and be detained, I might have accompanied aunt on her visits. But things happening in an inexplicable manner, in my hour of possible danger, God must have sent even a monster, a ruthless fiend, to protect me, seeing that my delight was in His law.

Mrs. Ephraim, a mother with two of her own daughters who would need a fair name in the world, a woman calling herself a Christian, did that which neither the tenderness of her sex, nor a love of God's truth, would have approved. Many women are anything but charitable

and humane, where their own sex is concerned, and they never think of their own souls, when they damn other people's souls. This woman, the most bloodthirsty exaggerator and concoctor of tales, who made it her mission to pry into other people's secrets, by employing whatever nefarious means, her vile brain could conceive, who trained up her own children as spies and eavesdroppers, made a show of great concern and anxiety for my morals, by confidently reporting to my aunt, the lie of all lies, that she had caught Rudran and me in a compromising position! Could spite and malice go further? I dare not attempt to recollect the details, even at the distance of a decade and a half. They have seared, scorched and burnt my brain.

If at that time, I railed against God, for allowing such a devastating evil to come upon me, when, He knew, I was guiltless, guileless, He had not failed me even then. He had raised up a dear, faithful friend for me in aunt Ambuja. She believed me absolutely and to show Mrs. Ephraim that her own story was discredited, kept me on and told me to act as if nothing had happened, not to take to heart the mischievous doings of a born mischief maker. My uncle too was very gentle and kind to me in those days of the first cruel shocks of my suffering, which have since been my constant portion in life.

I had an unbounded confidence in Rudran. He was young, and some fit of madness might have suddenly seized him, but there could be no harbour for treachery or grossness in such a

frank and genial nature as his. My uncle wrote to him confidentially, regarding me, and he had given a reply in the most unmistakable language, that he would keep his word, even if the whole world stood against him. That was balm for my aching, bleeding heart. His fidelity enabled me to pass another year in Sigripore without being absolutely crushed by the burden that I had to bear.

Mrs. Ephraim, however, had not forgotten my aunt's slighting her. She had published the false story with many vile embellishments, through the length and breadth of the town. Her daughter Christina did not omit her part, in making life a nightmare to me. People would whisper at sight of me and draw the attention of other folks to me, without the least consideration for my feelings. I hung my head in shame and spent a life of penance, till I completed my School Final at Sigripore. I bless aunt Ambuja wherever she may be now, for the stay and comfort she had been to me all those fearful days.

In their tender affection for me, my uncle and aunt had not given an inkling of the matter to the home folks. But once, when aunt Ambuja's mother came on a visit to her daughter, Mrs. Ephraim, all smiles and outward affection, with a heart, the substance of which was rank poison, invited her to tea, and gave out the vilest, the falsest version of my story. In a sudden fit of rage, my aunt's mother had done me the second irreparable wrong, telling Mrs. Ephraim all about my mother and sister,

with many expressions of deep regret that she had given her own daughter, Ambuja, in marriage to a member of such a disreputable family, and declaring that she would see with her two eyes, how her son would make an alliance with the daughter of such an underworld woman, as my mother. No wonder, the old woman absolved her own son, and laid the responsibility for that evening's incident on me alone, as I was supposed to be capable of practising the foulest wiles and blandishments, to induce any young man. Where was God, I asked, if a woman's stainless innocence is of no account whatever in the world and she is made to pay the penalty, for other people's mistakes or misdoings? Still I could bear that for Rudran's sake. But, neither the fulness of the tragedy, nor the fulness of the penalty I was to pay, was known either to me or to my worst enemies at this time.

CHAPTER XXIX

A BREAK IN THE NARRATIVE

SOME years passed, mostly in sorrow and darkness for me. With a spasm of pain, I rose from my bed, and in grief I closed my eyes. But youth is the period when often the head is just kept afloat by its own natural buoyancy, whereas the burden of decline would as naturally allow the waters of adversity to close over it. The company of those around me, during most of my waking hours, and the arduous tasks before me to fit me for my chosen career, scarcely left me any time to brood over my pain and affliction, in this sin-sick world, and I had enough of diversion to forget myself most of the time. This is a period which I have not much desire to recall, beyond mentioning some of the most important events.

Davy had won his Bachelor of Arts degree, had a job as a revenue inspector, and was married to a girl of Brahmin blood, according to the craze of the family. Hema was a very beautiful girl, but the marriage was an unhappy one from the start. Davy had not forgotten his own escapades with women, and when he had a wife and such an attractive one too, his anxiety

to guard her from other men's attentions, and to protect her from temptations, became a sort of obsession, and insanity with him, that kept him provokingly watchful over her person, her conversations even with members of her own sex, and her every act even to the extent of criticising or penalising sartorial details. The last was madness, stark, raving madness: for Hema herself had no love for any revolutionary departure from the victorian style. From the meagre sketch I am giving here, few people might guess what a terrible monster, a single track mind can make of a man, even though in other respects Davy was tenderness and self-sacrifice itself. Father and son, they wore their lives out in their anxiety to leave their families comfortably provided, and father and son, alienated peace from their homes by trifling with the feelings of the others. Sobered by his family responsibilities, Davy no longer had the extreme levity and frivolity of youth, and like his father was a regular church-goer, read his Bible and said his prayers, but his life did not prove his faith in God; for his over-anxiety and over-watchfulness and over-control, failed to take into account, God's part and responsibility in all these matters, and God's unfailing wisdom and omnipotence before his own pigmy powers. He behaved abnormally, as if the law which gave him a wife, had also given him rights even over her conscience, which seemed to require his interference in every trifling detail. The situation was intolerable. Reaction followed repression; disaster was all he reaped for his

pains, yet not for all the danger signals that he saw, nor for all the advice and warning, from well-meaning people, would he alter his attitude one single jot. He went on like a mad man on his mad career, oblivious to the fact that if the others also persisted in their own attitude, with as much doggedness and relentless determination, he would be miserably helpless. But he was not the man to adjust himself to circumstances using more discretion and less severity, and while doing his best, leaving the rest to God. He had his father's example before him too, and he had seen enough of life to understand that even God Almighty cannot force people to be righteous against their wills and against their own consent. Still he took it upon himself to do what Providence leaves alone.

Hemalata came from an enlightened family, where girls were not subjected to unnatural restraints. Davy knew this very well, and it was this fact which enabled him to meet his wife before their marriage and court her according to Western custom. The girl herself probably disliked the match, but she being one of a numerous family of daughters, her parents seem to have persuaded her. It was also rumoured that Davy who could never be trusted to behave honestly towards any young woman, had taken advantage of the freedom, and destroyed Hema's integrity, which made the parents bent on bringing the marriage about. This seems to be the reason for the insane methods of repression he had adopted after his marriage; for, what he had done to

Hema before the law gave her to him, another man equally unscrupulous might do. The home tragedy, in the lives of the older generation, was reproduced in Davy's family life. I used to resent Davy's interference, even in such purely feminine matters, as the kitchen department and I also used to observe how in her natural resentment, Hema used to disobey him, if not openly, then in a devious manner. The nature of his work used to keep him away from home during his circuits. At such times without his police guard on her, Hema used to act like the proverbial mice when the cat is away, and not only that, she set about doing the very things she was ordered not to do. Many of them may not have been serious things at all, but her conduct showed her defiance. For a few years, Davy had kept her in her father's house, only visiting her whenever he could, but he had quarrelled violently with the old gentleman for criticising him for his dictatorial manners, and so saying that not even her parents were entitled to interfere with his authority over her, Davy had brought her away. Hema ought to have avoided downright open rebellion, but when Davy had not the least consideration for her own feelings, it is not a wonder that she had not the slightest respect for his commands. Men like Davy, always ignore the fact, that the individuals over whom they tyrannise, have feelings which would be dangerous and disastrous to provoke. He would reprimand or judge her not only in front of their relatives, but unfeelingly before strangers too. What did he

gain but her vindictive reprisals which embittered his life more and more ? It is not with an unfeeling view of exposing every member of my house that I set down all these heart-burning details, but as a duty to the world where there are many and many individuals like the ones discussed here ; it is with the ardent wish and hope that they may reflect on the worth-whileness of their vindictive actions, exaggerated authority and otherwise destructive methods, which do not even stop with themselves in their evil results but make innocent souls also suffer and continue to pursue them long after the original actors may themselves have departed. Friends would discuss with me his unnatural harshness and express that he might have spared her the scoldings and offensive orders, at least in front of them, as if she were a servant. They would ask me to advise Davy. I to advise Davy, who had no respect even for grey hairs ! He would harp on the one point that he was responsible only to God, but what was the use of his making out a case for himself with God, without getting God on his side, by surrendering himself ? Without being sure that a plan or a remedy was such as God would approve ? The resulting consequence was failure spelt out in so many letters, if not a cataclysm. There are people who, when they are convinced of the futility of a particular course of action which could not possibly have Divine support at the back just abandon their course at any stage, and place their burden at the Lord's feet, no matter, if what already has

been done cannot be undone ; for from that point at least, things would begin to get straight. But Davy unfortunately for himself and his family, belonged to the other set, who will never deviate, come what may, even if they are heading towards a maelstrom. How strange, that we Christians give God so little opportunity to direct our lives and ways!

CHAPTER XXX

HARRY AND MOTHER

HARRY who had been Davy's disciple first and lieutenant later, turned out a downright loafer. Under much pressure of intimidation from father, he had just managed to complete his third form before he solemnly pronounced the obsequies on his studies. There was no home for us, so to speak, no mother's love or influence, but a father who was always in the role of a patriarch. Harry held up uncle Purushotham, alias, uncle Murray, as his ideal to cite in support for his own want of application and industry.

"How is uncle Purushotham getting on without better qualifications than mine? I wonder if Davy with his hard-earned university degree is able to make money like him; and there are hundreds of other graduates who are loafing about for want of a job. What extraordinary luck does education bring one?" he would add with a sneer.

"But how can you be so positive that your uncle Purushotham's good luck will come your way too?" my father would ask and then: "No man, but a senseless fool will waste his time waiting for chances to turn up and bring him luck."

Father spoke from his years of experience and from human history in general; Harry from the fantasies of indolent and irresponsible youth.

but as things actually fell out, strange to say, Harry was right and father wrong. The immediate result, however, of the arguments between father and son was that Harry ran away from home. He had always been arrogant about his athletic build and strong constitution, and had always dreamt of the great physical or acrobatic feats he would perform as a pugilist, a circus rider and many things in turn. Unfortunately his faith in his own future prowess far exceeded the belief of others in him, where athletics were concerned. His other passion was for music and drama. This, however, fetched him better luck, in that he secured temporary jobs here and there in amateur acting, but left him without the fortune he had hoped to make at one stroke in order to enjoy a lifetime of indolence and sloth. What he earned during these brief intervals was hardly sufficient to make both ends meet, under the strictest economy. A fop of the most exaggerated type, he found his wages far from satisfying his cravings for cigarettes, perfumes, beedas, and the other things, which in his eyes were the indispensable equipment and hall-mark of a fine gentleman. He preferred to go without a meal rather than forego the least of these accessories. He patronised coffee-clubs, entertained friends on a lavish scale, mounted up credit and started misappropriating cash and trinkets as a private pastime. We had always known him to be addicted to snuff, even from early boyhood. How he acquired the habit I cannot tell, but it became worse and worse.

with him, as the years rolled by. When during the bad seasons he was a ragged wanderer without a job, he was too proud to return like the Prodigal Son to his father's house. Still he harangued that it did not pay a man to stick to one billet. The sight of his broken manhood would wring blood out of my heart, but he laughed at pity and mocked at advice and I saw that no amount of sympathy could save my brother, when he was under the indisputable conviction that nothing was wrong with him. Who can help those who refuse to see or recognise the evils they are bringing upon themselves with their own hands, let alone the others who are made to suffer with them? The time came too that Harry was arrested for a theft and just escaped conviction because he was clever enough to have obliterated every trace that might give a clue against him, the family wealth and reputation securing for him a bail in the meanwhile.

Then came the miracle of miracles, the fulfilment of Harry's prophecy about good luck. The War broke out, the War, where fiends and demons had staged a deadly Armageddon, where the Attilas and Chengiz Khans of the world must have stood mute and aghast at the scenes of carnage, holocaust and devastation, unknown to the savage and barbarian tribes anywhere, but constituting the special mark of civilisation. Yes, civilisation which in times of peace labours tirelessly for the welfare of its children, devising endless measures for the prosperity of a nation, and in times of war pulls down with its own

hands, in a fraction of the time, the structure it had so painfully built up; civilisation conquering physical forces and succumbing to brute passions and committing suicide!

Yes, the War came and gave Harry his chance—war that can turn traitors and felons into patriots, if not heroes, giving them extraordinary advantages over honest, hard working, peace loving citizens. Harry got enlisted for a postal clerk's job in Iraq during the last phase of the war. Though the war itself did not last much longer, it was years before we saw him again as he did not seem inclined to return to his country.

Emmie was a schoolmistress in the far south; she kept her little girl with her and seldom came to see us, though reconciliation had taken place by this time. Mary seemed to have been showing unmistakable signs of an inclination to follow in her mother's and sister's footsteps and to prevent another catastrophe, she was long ago given away in marriage to a rolling stone who had seen some War service and was at that time a schoolmaster at Dindigul. Sophie had for some years been laid at rest. Willie and I were still students.

But the one event worth recording during this uninteresting period was my mother's return, a thing for which I had implored God without ceasing night or day. If this was a miracle, then my father's receiving her back was more than a miracle. It seemed to restore half my peace of mind. Indeed, the heroism displayed by a mere human being in forgiving a wife who had brought

such shame and ignominy and sorrow on himself and his house, was almost divine in its nature. He did it too in the face of terrific opposition from his sisters and brothers.

In all my private sorrows, my mother's return was the greatest earthly comfort to me. I came to the restored home for the holidays, a home where the other children were not to be found. My mother's face brightened up at the sight of me, but my own fell at the very first meeting. How old and changed she looked! Not at all the mother whose image we all bore in our minds. She was corpulent, the facial muscles were all considerably sagging, the hair was predominantly white, and she had developed a dewlap of a double chin. The lines and creases on her forehead and cheeks were silent witnesses to the ravages of time and a life of dissipation. Granting that the change in her was so great that it grieved me to think, she had entered old age suddenly without the change taking place gradually before my eyes, yet in one respect, I rejoiced for the misfortune. No longer could my mother keep us in perpetual dread of some new indiscretion, some fresh act of shame, ever on the look-out for lovers and admirers, and ever threatening to leave us to go away with some one who had flattered her looks, praised her virtues and promised to cherish her like a 'parrot'. No more, those nightmare days for me, thank God. My heart was once and for all set at rest on this point. But my mother, though no longer even youngish or attractive, still had

the same roving eyes, sometimes with a sort of animal look in them that made me turn away my face in fright. What had happened to her infamous lover, or what led her to retrace her steps home, I shall never know. But that she had suffered much was plainly evident, and her remorse for Sophie was often expressed, when she was alone with me.

I cannot give an exact analysis of her character as it was after her return. I think that though she had completely sobered down, there was still some sort of unsteadiness and restlessness, which made it difficult from what point to view her. I told you she had the same roving eyes with now a fearful expression. There could be no meaning in that now, but that it must have been only the result of hardened habit. There were moments of maternal grief for Sophie and anxious concern for her Harry. She had even started to read the Scriptures and Christian literature with some zest, in strong contrast to her previous intolerance for them. She was regular in church going, listened to the sermons attentively and discussed them, and said her own private prayers as she had never done before. It made one draw the inevitable conclusion, that though she had given her youth and best years to the devil, in old age she was seeking God. But how far these things helped in her daily life and conduct towards others, you shall see. She had not altogether conquered her old time repugnance to father, the man whose head had turned snow white prematurely, on account of her perfidy..

the man who had flung his doors wide open for her return, after she had left his shelter and protection with such contempt. My father was still morose and dominating, but his fearful sufferings had made him less harsh and terrorising than before. Her attitude to father never failed to give the impression, that nothing short of complete destitution as an alternative had driven mother back to her old moorings.

There were no children at the restored home now. All had grown up and were carrying on their different destinies in their own appointed spheres. One of them had entered her rest blasted in her tender years. Only, Willie and I had not completed our courses, and would come back, but it was seldom that even we were together under the paternal roof. So, my mother's time hung heavily on her. The servant continued to do all the house work as when my father had lived by himself. There was little for my mother to do, nobody to talk to at home, few friends for intimate conversation. I used to observe, how restlessly, she would pace up and down the hall—our drawing-room by day, and bed-room by night—while father sat in the outer verandah in his cane-back easy chair, reading or talking to friends in his retirement. She was like a caged lioness then, and she was for ever grouching that father should make her live in such a dungeon of a house, when he could afford for a more commodious one, with at least a patch of a garden to make life tolerable. As father was one of the prominent

Christians of the place, missionaries were among his usual callers. Sometimes lady missionaries, surprised to find mother back, would ask her, when she had returned and whether she was going to stay on. Such questions, natural as they were from what they had known of her, used to make her blood boil and she would say to me: "Where else do they expect me to stay on if not in my own house?" Often in a pious mood, she would indicate a desire to take me into fuller confidence, but somehow, though I knew there was something on her mind, which gave her no peace, till she had shared it with some one, she would let the occasion pass without uttering what seemed to be trembling on her lips. She ended the whole thing by blaming father, for the cruelties which had caused her to sink so low in the opinion of the world. At the time she chose the false path, she did it deliberately, reckless of what the world might think and quite dead to every sense of shame and modesty. Now, she resented people's curiosity, and now she cared for their respect. But even now she would never spare father.

"How nice he is to strangers and how respectable a citizen of the town! But I am sure, this new fad of his is going to be his death. Why should he pretend to be a Brahmin, when he is the son of a Chuckler corpse burner? Let him pretend and kill himself and be done with it. I don't care, so long as he leaves a provision for me." Whether her base lover, after ruining her and her husband and children, had

cast her off or whether he had relieved the earth of the burden of his own vile existence is more than is given me to know, but my blood used to boil whenever she made heartless and insulting references to my father. Alas, how little was the whole truth known to me! My mother's ingratitude made me pity and love my father all the more. Yet, I was far from approving his new fad myself. He had taken to a purely vegetarian diet late in life. If he had been born of vegetarian ancestors, no harm might have come. But his blood was the essence of the life stream of hundreds of generations of flesh eaters, and for him to undergo the drastic discipline of such a change in his declining years, was madness. It told visibly on his health. The daily wasting was perceptible. Yet the old stubbornness with which he clung to any of his opinions as the only common sense views, made it impossible for anybody to convince him of the impending disaster.

I was then in my final year, L. M. P. and was putting up at the Y. W. C. A. My best friends here was Felicia Ambrose, a very pretty girl, who, in spite of her English name, was an Indian Christian. Her father was a retired educationist in an Indian State. Felicia's brothers and sisters were all in good positions. Mr. Walter Ambrose, the first born of Felicia's mother, who was her father's second wife, had married an English girl during his studies abroad. To a family already living in high style, and moving only with society people, this marriage

was a great asset and added to their exclusiveness. Felicia herself was free from this family reserve in circles other than their own, or at least she was so at the Y. W. C. A. As far as I was concerned she was even intimate.

Fashionable Indian Christian ladies had not yet altogether abandoned the style of saree with gathers at the back in imitation of the victorian gown with its train. Felicia's family being ultra fashionable, the members went in for a style peculiar to themselves, at any rate, to distinguish them even from the ordinary stylish folks. My friend wore only a knee length saree, and had a cap on her head. Her dresses were all charming crepe de chine, georgette and other fine and flimsy stuffs with rich trimmings of gold or silver thread. Felicia had invited me to spend a holiday with her, and I consented.

The distractions at College and in the City kept my spirits in normal buoyancy, except when letters arrived from home, taking me back to the bitter atmosphere there—the news of the widening chasm between Davy and Hema, even after little Raju and Sampath were born; Harry's urgent call for five hundred rupees without stating the circumstances and father's asking for the reasons first, resulting in the prolonged and nerve racking silence with which Harry had sought to retaliate; father's own indifferent health and mother's accusations against what she called his heartlessness in not going to his son's rescue; and father's taunting her about her abandonment of all her children, even the sickly girl who had

called for her mother on her death-bed. Well, the old, old story again, always sore with fresh wounds, with no hope of healing.

It was a long and cruel struggle by which I had to root out Rudran's image from my heart, but that was done and the passing years left the incident only a sad memory but a never-to-be forgotten one. One afternoon, while we were having tea, Margaret Dhanaraj, who dropped in late, reached out a card to me, which sent my heart into my mouth as it were. She noticed my excitement, and laughed as she remarked : " I guessed it would give you a flutter, Miss Prakasarao, for the young man was so impatient, that I could hardly restrain him. He looked as if he would make straight for the dining-room, but I gave a chair and made him sit there." I blushed, but all the same answered, that there was nothing between us, yet I could hardly swallow my cup of tea. After that I went out, alternately red and pale, and the more I tried to suppress my feelings, making a clearer betrayal of them. Rudran was no longer boyish looking. He had put on weight and appeared stronger, and in his black alpaca suit, handsomer than ever. I refrain from reproducing our conversation, but you can guess its trend. I fought on hardening my heart, to make him understand definitely, though plucking out my heart from its place, that our acquaintance was not to continue, beyond that evening. He was staggered, called me cruel, faithless and what not ! I could not speak much for the tears that threatened to betray me, but begged him

to be less hysterical, and to lower his voice so as not to draw attention to ourselves. I told him emphatically--each word stabbing my heart--that though he might have waited years for me, I was not worth the trouble, and that after all the insults I had received from his mother, it would be impossible for me to kill what amount of self-respect I had.

We parted. I went about my work like a demented creature, with a flame consuming heart and brain, and the necessity to behave normally before the others was the torture of the Inquisition. I did invite remarks and questions, from Felicia chiefly, but requested my friends not to worry me. I thought a second bath would give my throbbing head some relief, turned off the tap and sat under it for a long time. Then with wet hair I went to bed, waking up the next morning with a severe cold, which though making me physically miserable for the time being, furnished me an excuse for looking bad. This feeling wore out in time. I was still young and Madras has so many attractions and distractions. Sometimes, I used to feel that I was drifting away from the point when I was nearest to God in my life.

Willie had come to Madras for his college studies and never failed to come and see me every week end. Though he was nearly as much a snob as Davy in his reckless days and Harry always was, still it was quite plain that Willie was a more sensible fellow than either of his brothers and possessed a more solid character.

CHAPTER XXXI

MADANAPALLE

I T was a time when my heart would yearn for my parents, but it was never with burning eagerness that I looked forward to the opportunity for going home. The pride that has now left me crushed and humbled, beaten down by wave after wave of life's sorrow and shame, to find peace only when I cast myself exhausted at the feet of my Heavenly Father, was lingering still. Perhaps, if I had understood God and His ways then, as I do now, I might have been able to help matters to some extent, but it is only a conjecture, not a certainty; for if people are bent on taking a certain course at all costs, there is no earthly or heavenly help for them. They suffer inevitably, and they make others suffer unnecessarily.

My father's health was the source of the utmost anxiety for me just then. The united pressure of his parents when they were alive, and of his brothers and sisters, had made him abandon his exclusively vegetarian diet, after my mother's return. But that was no longer of much avail seeing that he had experimented with his health too late in life to stand the strain, and he had failed to supply the deficiencies in a purely vegetarian

diet by the use of liberal quantities of milk, curds and ghee or butter. When I was by myself lost in melancholy thoughts, his particular tenderness for me in spite of a natural roughness of temper, and manner, and his faith in my truthfulness, when I was deceiving him with lies to shield my mother, used to smite my heart and bring tears into my eyes. To the last, he never knew my perjury, but he was spared the blow of a worse revelation. Then, in spite of her treachery, when he opened his doors to her after she had been cast adrift in the world, my mother's abiding hatred for him used to hurt me dreadfully.

I was in my final year, when it was known that the only hope for my father's recovery was the sanatorium at Madanapalle. Aunt Krupa brought him down to Madras, travelling all the way in the second class. After a couple of days spent in resting, he was taken to Madanapalle accompanied by Willie. The anxiety about his expenses was killing him sooner than his sickness. No amount of reasoning could cure him of this fatal obsession.

For a whole year he was at Madanapalle and gaining weight. My mother had nowhere to stay now except with Davy. For one reason Davy welcomed her. She was too old to give him any more anxiety of the sort which was our daily portion in childhood, and she would be a valuable guardian at home, on the other hand, when he went camping.

During a short vacation I went to Madanapalle to see father. My friend, Miss Cherian, was

there. She used to visit the patient now and then and gave me an invitation to go and spend some time with her. As we approached the place, my heart sank and a shiver passed through my whole frame to see the sanatorium buildings standing on the eminences of Arogyavaram. The salubrious air of the place and the welcome coolness after the sweltering heat of Madras and the tiresome journey, failed to cool the fever in my brain and the sickness in my heart. There, in one of them, at last, lying helpless was the father, who had dominated and directed our lives so long.

When I arrived at Mariam Cherian's residence, what was my surprise to find Miss Parsons there as a guest already! She had not changed, and yet she had changed in a revolutionary way too. There was the same smiling face with its pimples and blackheads; her manner was the same, more genial if possible, and there appeared no perceptible difference in her weight either. But, instead of the long hair done up gracefully, she now wore a bob, which made her head look larger and clumsier than before. The gown no longer reached towards the ankle. It just covered the knees, when she stood and exposed even her thighs and drawers when she sat. She smoked at all hours of the day, and at nights instead of slipping into a kimono or a night gown, she wore pyjamas. "I am a bachelor girl, and mean to live like a man," she said to me once.

We visited father at the sanatorium that evening. He was indeed looking much better than

when I saw him on his way thither. The cough was better and the temperature on the downward swing. There was a shady road close by, where under the doctor's instructions, the patients were allowed to have a little exercise in walking, the limit being prescribed in each case. I had never realised tuberculosis to be such a dreadful scourge, till I had visited this sanatorium and saw the numbers of helpless human beings lying stretched on beds and watching the visitors with pathetic faces. There was another experience which makes me shudder at the thought even now. It was the hungry sensual look in the hectic lustre of the eyes of the young men when a young woman chanced to cross their vision. We were told that father would be soon discharged, but he would have to continue the sanatorium treatment with regard to rest and diet for a long time to come. That was good news, and I thought he might be kept under aunt Krupa's care, till I had finished my own course, but under no circumstances in the same house with mother. The reunion had not proved happier than the disruption that had preceded it.

As father was improving, I immensely enjoyed my brief holiday at Madanapalle. Miss Parsons treated me as a close friend and not with the air of a teacher before a pupil. Her special talent always lay in conversation, wherein lay my special defect. I would be at a loss to know what to say to keep the conversation going, but not so Miss Parsons, who seemed to know the right thing to say at the right moment and she

never was a bore, when silence would have been embarrassing. One of her trunks was full of pieces for dresses and she whiled away the time during Mariam's absence stitching there on the Singer's hand machine. She had her work-box about her, even during a conversation, for whenever she was not stitching, her fingers were busy tatting. Once Mariam asked her: "Stella, show Meena your friend's picture."

Miss Parsons simply laughed and kept quiet. Mariam made for the leather suit-case, as if she would take the picture out. Miss Parsons gave a shriek, dropped the tatting, and pushing away Mariam secured the keys in her hands.

"Let me see how long you will hide it from her," said Mariam. In fact it was not very long, before Mariam caught her looking at the photograph and made secret signals to me, when I sprang a surprise on her. She could not put it away in its place the lid pocket of the suit-case with more alacrity than Mariam in snatching the picture from her hands. I later on noticed that she took it out from time to time and gazed at it with some kind of devotion. The picture showed the profile of a handsome young man on a post-card bearing only the bust.

"This is 'Ted'," Mariam with an arch smile introduced the picture man to me.

"Yes, my Ted," answered Miss Parsons as if she felt proud of the fact. "What do you make out Meena? Isn't he a blonde?"

"I can't distinguish blondes from brunettes, and that too in pictures," I answered, wondering

how Miss Parsons never a beauty, and now so masculine in her ways, ever could have attracted such a handsome specimen of the opposite sex, and that too a pure blooded white man. But glancing more critically at her face than I have ever done in my school girl days, I remarked: "I should have expected to see a ring on your finger, Miss Parsons.

"Oh dear, what an idea!" she giggled, not altogether displeased. "This is a sacred sort of friendship, where betrothals and weddings are not to come in. That is against the principle. It is sort of a--well--we just correspond and exchange the most intimate confidences. It is so useful to have a friendship of that kind when you have to lead a sort of a lonely life, you know."

"What is 'Ted's' full name?" I queried, after examining the back of the card and finding only the words, 'To Stella, from Ted', "and where does he live?"

"I must not tell you his name. He lives in Philadelphia, but I may not give you his address either," replied Miss Parsons.

"But what on earth brought about such an intimate friendship between you two folks, living as far apart as the two Poles?" I asked in utter astonishment.

"You see there is an Agency somewhere in India which puts two people into communication, if they are seeking friends. They introduce the two to each other and furnish each with the other's address. We sort of exchange photos and address each other by our Christian names."

"Is the friendship irrespective of sexes or always between members of the opposite sexes?" I continued, my catechism.

"Always between a man and a woman."

"Have you sent your photo to 'Ted'?"

"Of course, I had to. He must have thought what an awful grizzly bear I must be." She laughed it away, but I could see the pang it cost her to think of her own plainness.

"Miss Parsons," I said, "your heart would attract anybody in the world," and that was true.

"What does a youngster like you know about hearts?" she remarked looking up from a pear that she was peeling.

"You mustn't think I am such a youngster as all that, Miss Parsons. I really am nearly as old as you are. Only I began my studies late and was your pupil instead of your school-mate. By the by, my father does not approve of my going to the Gold Fields. It is such a disappointment."

Mariam very chivalrously suggested: "Then we had better drop that scheme altogether for the time and go somewhere else."

The original plan was to take an excursion to see the gold mines of Kolar, not far from Madanapalle, but my father was highly nervous about mining accidents, which are frequently reported in the papers, and I did not wish to disobey him.

"Have you been to the Gold Fields before, Mariam?" I asked.

"I haven't. It's no fun going without proper company," answered she.

"Company makes even a dull commonplace sort of thing interesting," put in Miss Parsons. "My own work for instance,—I am simply fed up with it. The first time you see new places on your tour, you are interested. I love natural scenery and hill-climbing, but the work is so tiresome. Then the journeys are disgusting beyond utterance. Ask Mariam. The route is often a mere track through the fields for miles, and you have to put up with any sort of conveyance that is available or foot it all the way if there is none. It is not pleasant driving you know, when your bullock bandy goes sort of bumping all the way up and down on the uneven surface and you are constantly lurching, thrown on your back this moment and on your face the next. The back simply aches and the bones all seem to be going to pieces. Then there is no respite. We have to do two or three schools a day and sometimes in three or four different villages. Often with a breaking back when you arrive at a place you find the school closed.

"I have often had to travel in topless bullock waggons with my parasol, sort of protecting me from the horrid heat. Fancy, riding in this silly manner and the whole village turning out to stare at me, and the mischievous little urchins trooping behind my cart! In the rainy season one has to sort of wade in the slush, shoes and stockings off. I clasp my camp clerk's waist as he makes way ahead, and sort of—— 'follow in his footsteps'! Not the least discomfort for a woman officer is the want of privacy. If

I try to walk by myself for a little while trying to find a bush or something to screen me, these chaps, the clerk and the peon, come looking for me at once. They feel it sort of neglecting their duty if they are not always acting as my body-guard. I say Meena, you are a lucky girl to have taken up medicine."

"It is positively harmful to the constitution you know, when you feel sick and can't find a lonely spot. Even when the village is come and you whisper ever so confidentially in the ears of a conductress to take you somewhere, the whole school is at your heels to see what the inspectress is after. You are not even certain of a meal, let alone comfortable food. When this Mariam girl once came to spend a holiday with me, I took her to camp——"

"And I enjoyed her camping," Mariam interrupted. "You see, this lady got bored with the interviewers, and grandly went off to bed leaving me to deal with the callers. The village teachers, poor devils, who are as ignorant as the children they teach, idling away their time for a whole year, make a show of enthusiasm at inspection time and flood you with petitions. The folks brought me presents of fruits and flowers, paid me no end of compliments and poured into my aching ears endless tales of grievances. It was all I was worth to look serious, with the camp clerk and the peon watching the proceedings with such comic looks on their faces, you know! When we arrived in our raincoats at a certain place on a wet day, not only were

they unable to guess which of us was the officer, but were also quite in the dark as to whether we were men or women. You can always play a hoax on the villagers, Meena, such simpletons they are."

"We can impose on the townspeople, too, my dear, if they don't recognize us," Miss Parsons contradicted her. I was once Devaki's guest at Masula and that child passed me off for the lady doctor. As I was in a gown and she in a saree the job was quite easy, for everybody takes the person in the gown to be the most important individual. The sly Puss would sit there only, watching all her clients and patients come up to me for their prescriptions, for the diagnosis of each one's complaint and reciting a list of their ailments and symptoms. It was such a farce and we enjoyed the joke immensely."

"But I haven't finished my account of my impersonating you," Mariam said and went on. "You know Meena, what a sensitive conscience Stella has got? Why, she gave me such a shaking, when I allowed some of her petitioners to place their offerings on the table. She absolutely refuses to accept a bunch of leaves, believe me."

"Don't be so cheeky in exaggerating like that, my dear. I am not so eccentric as to call leaves and flowers, bribes. It really makes one feel perfectly awkward to accept gifts from subordinates knowing in the depths of your heart why they are given. It is for that reason I am very strict. I do not offer gifts or bribes to my superior officers, either. You know Mariam,

Miss Donaldson is actually prejudiced against me for not giving her supplies? Why should I give? I am not paid for that. And what does she do with her own handsome daily allowance? Doesn't want to touch that I believe."

My friends discussed their own experiences in their jobs and related not a few interesting, instructive and humorous anecdotes. We spent our free time mostly playing bridge, guessing riddles, and going out for long walks. Once we went for a picnic to a beautiful river valley and had a delightful time there. As long as I was away from home, my thoughts during quiet and lonely hours would be there, making a survey of all the past, feeling cruel pangs as fresh as if the painful event which gave it, had occurred only yesterday. I used to brood over all the sharp and harsh things I myself have said and done many a time, hurting one loved member or another. I suffered the retribution in terrible remorse. In the case of some, there was still time to make up somewhat, whereas with some others the opportunity would never come again. Night and day I thought of and prayed for my dear ones, but there was no joy in the contemplation of going to them. For me there was no happiness in the midst of my near and dear ones. They did not understand. They only thought I was unnatural.

CHAPTER XXXII

FELICIA'S HOME

FELICIA was to go to England for higher studies, after she had finished her course at home. Before she sailed, however, she invited me to spend a fortnight with her. When this happened, my father had long been discharged from the sanatorium and having spent some months with aunt Krupa had returned home, quite well, as he had fancied. I had no misgivings about him and as continuous change of scenery or travel alone gave me relief from brooding, I accepted my friend's invitation with pleasure and visited the capital of an Indian State.

Looking back on that visit, it is the style that the Ambroses lived rather than the beauties of Kesarinagar which has impressed itself so strongly on my mind. There were parks and palaces, boulevards and drives, glittering shops and brilliant illumination by electric lamps at nights, making me feel like living in a fairyland of romance. Felicia gave me a crowded programme of visits and picnics and excursions, pictures and theatres and carnivals, which made me forget myself and my Creator during those magic spells. Only at

nights, when we raced along the deserted boulevards, and I gasped for breath at the speed we were making. I used to wonder where we would all be, and of what use the Ambrose's wealth to them, if the car but swerved ever so slightly, and pitched headlong over a culvert or dashed against a tree. But then the enjoyment of the "Glory of motion", with the cool night air of a hot country, rushing against my face, intoxicated me to that extent, when thoughts of possible danger do not worry one much.

To my mind, Felicia's people lived in super-fashionable style. They lived in a palace as it were surrounded by a great park. The grand drive from the elegant gate to the porch ran between beds of phlox, petunia, larkspur, pinks, dahlias, hollyhocks, geraniums and many other blossoms that made the place look like a horticultural show. Roses, pink, snow-white, cream, yellow, red and even green grew in clusters (generally on tall bushes and sometimes on dwarf plants in pots. Bougainvillea creepers hung their showers of scarlet and purple blooms over bowers and arches. There was a fountain surrounded by marble statues and in the intervals by marble bowls or vases holding rare foliage or flower plants. The border plants were all neatly trimmed and everywhere cut into fantastic shapes representing chiefly lions, but also a monkey here, a peacock there, and so on. The lawns were green with the softest springy grass like green plush, and Felicia told me they raised this grass from seed specially ordered from England. Flocks of sparrows

sported on the sward and made a heart-entrancing sight with their gladness. The tall ancient trees of the park with so many rich varieties of shade in the very green of their foliage, made me think and dream of things I cannot express. Nature and art had made life one long spell of joy to the Ambroses. There were tennis and badminton courts and a pond over which a gaily painted pleasure boat for a pleasure sail floated and there were gold fish in a bowl which were not really golden in colour.

The mansion itself was one worthy of exhibition, and but for the royal palaces in the capital might have been a show place for the casual tourist. The decorations, the mirrors, the hangings, the upholstery, the china, the silver and gold ware, the mahogany and marble, all staggered me. The rooms tempted exploration like the fabled ones in King Blue-beard's castle for their treasures. Even the culinary department and the poultry house were admirable in their own style.

In the midst of such dazzling splendour and the marvellous dresses of the members and their friends, I, in my plain clothes which were too few to change as often as my entertainers did, felt that I was the shabbiest creature alive, so out of place in my surroundings. If it was a mistake to have availed myself of Felicia's invitation, it gave me some valuable experiences likewise. I had an apartment all to myself, with its attached toilet and all the accessories that wealth

could pay for. The dressing table, the beautifully draped bed, the wardrobe and chairs, electric lights and fan, a book-case, pictures and ornaments,—I was like Cinderella of the fairy tale for a brief ten days.

Felicia had booked me for a fortnight, but the very luxuries that surrounded me were so oppressive that I wanted to hasten my departure on some plausible excuse. Always embarrassed and clumsy, in strange company, in a place like this, I was now in absolute despair. Here, as nowhere else, I suffered from awkward lapses of memory frequently. My thoughts simply scattered and vanished and utterance died on my lips. I had no idea what to say and I had found myself absolutely tongue-tied. Always self-conscious to an extreme degree, in Felicia's house, I found myself just a bundle of nerves. It was with a sinking heart that I would go down to join the family at breakfast and dinner, or in the drawing-room. Often to my great and unutterable relief, chota hazri and lunch used to be brought to my room and these were the only refreshments I enjoyed in peace and which kept me from starving.

It was not the company alone that I dreaded at table. The courses were bewildering, and I was never accustomed to English table etiquette. I have, besides, never relished a meal unless I had my usual rice and curry with plenty of condiments. I did not know how to use the knives and spoons and forks, on which side of my plate to keep what, when to eat toast, and

there were several other difficulties too. I was very awkward in trying to be overcareful not to drop the crumbs, or spill the soup on the table cloth or the serviette napkin. Rice and curry formed but one of a dozen courses, and only a small helping was taken while I longed for more. I would have been glad to have had only this course served to my fill. I wondered, how the others being Indians too, in spite of all their artificiality, could be satisfied with such a meal as this. I used to pass many dishes untouched and suffer from pinching hunger afterwards. Then there was the continuous stream of conversation, exchange of wit and repartee, relating of experiences, discussing of views and news, and how fast they talked, and yet how softly, almost in whispers! I was never more lonely in all my life than in this company. I longed that Felicia at least would sit next to me. But no; it was always one of her brothers or male-cousins who was put next to me and their very anxiety according to etiquette to be attentive to my wants was like persecution. I was aware all the time that I was making a fool of myself by being so diffident and shy, but I could not help it.

Felicia's mother, the second Mrs. Ambrose, was a fair skinned and spare lady, who in her fineries and spectacles, looked very grand and handsome even on the wrong side of fifty, but a close up revealed whatever defects she had. Her front teeth being prominent, her face in profile made me in those pagan days think of a baboon, and there was also an unmistakable growth of

hair on her upper lip—concealed under a few layers of powder—as well as a few strings of hair under the chin. She was very witty and very energetic. Her scanty hair, showing many bare patches on the scalp was done up in a knot. Her dress consisted of a long skirt and a blouse with a high collar and long sleeves. Over these, in the evenings, she wore a scrap of a robe, a very poor apology for a saree, a wisp of gossamer web glittering with silver and gold thread. As this was a highly Anglicised family, she like every other member was all day in shoes and stockings.

Mr. Ambrose senior, joined the family at table. He had had an operation recently done for cataract, and he was further both deaf and gouty. In addition, he had had a stroke from high blood pressure and seldom left his room. He was the only person there clothed without encumbrances, having nothing on but soft loose linen drawers and shirt and a pair of bed-room slippers. Though his own son, Mr. Ambrose junior, was a medical man the father had daily visits from his own doctor.

The eldest daughter of Mr. Ambrose, by his second wife, was exceedingly devoted to her father and was very attentive to his comforts, anticipating all his wants and in general making him feel more infirm and sick than he really was.

This daughter, Mrs. Ranjan, universally called Gladys, was a study for any curious person. She was dark brown like her father and was the very double of her doctor brother, in feminine garments. Her face beamed with intelligence, and

she was overflowing with energy and wit. Her usual style was the Parsee fashion saree without the veil, in the place of which she covered her head with a curious kind of silk hood falling on the back in two tasselled ends. Mrs. Ranjan always wore costly dresses, gauzy and sparkling with gold and silver tissue and tinsel braids. Three times a day at least she changed her dress and a fourth time slipped into her night gown before retiring to bed. She had, I believe, a dozen sets of jewels, for she changed a set every day and I never saw the same on her again. She was an expert at the piano. Further, she worked wonderful designs in silk and gold thread on velvet braids for sarees, made marvellous pieces of lace, cut out cretonne designs and sewed them on to the table cloths and cushion covers, did gardening, supervised cooking, gave out the stores for the day, watched the milking, entertained guests, conversed with callers and worshipped her father and mother.

Apart from all her duties she yet found time to go out for a morning ride on her favourite mare. This was the first time I had seen an Indian lady go riding in a man's riding habit and it gave me a series of spasms which I had much ado in suppressing. She always returned home with a handful of wild flowers gathered in the fields or woods. Mrs. Ranjan's dark brown skin showed quite fair under the constant treatment with creams and powders and with her pencilled eyebrows, painted lips with the dazzling ear-pendants swaying to and fro as she moved about

she looked very attractive. She had no children of her own, but she had adopted her brother's son, who with his fair skin inherited from his English mother, cherry lips, blue eyes and curly golden hair was a very pretty boy. He was her little 'Bonnie'.

Mr. Ranjan was the proprietor of Hotel de Belle. He was younger than his wife and more worldly if possible. Diamonds flashed on all his fingers, and from the jewelled watch on his wrist. His cigarette holder was of chased gold and the cigarette case embossed with gold and silver work. Perfume heralded his approach. Even his walking stick was one of the costliest of its kind. He was no stranger to facial make up either, though it was only light touches that he gave to his naturally fair complexion. Goodness only knows what he exactly used in order to keep his hair in the very position he wished, for never a wisp was ever out of place. Not only was he a very good-looking fellow, but also seemed to be quite conscious of it and not a little vain too. There did not appear to be much of an attachment between husband and wife. It did give a careful observer the impression that he did not care very much for Gladys and she was too proud to let others see her pain. In company, however, they "deared", and "darlinged", each other, English fashion, but spoke as if both belonged to the same sex. Mr. Ranjan never seemed to be troubled to be caught ogling the guests and visitors of the fair sex. I had my due share of his attention, which I resented not only for

his impertinence, but also from an uncomfortable feeling of being watched by his wife. What inward tortures hers might have been, none could see, but she was quite pleasant and nice even to those to whom her husband displayed open admiration.

I think, Mrs. Ranjan's consolation lay in her wealth. She exercised a masterful control over his financial affairs. In this respect he was like a baby in her hands. He had to hand over all the cash into her custody and to account for the day's transactions. She opened and read all his letters before passing them on to him, suppressing any which might contain an appeal for financial help or a loan. His own letters to his friends and relatives were likewise censored and only those which met with her approval could be forwarded.

A brother of Felicia, Henry Ambrose, and a cousin, Manoharam Arthur, had come down for the holidays. I could observe in both young men a strong but silent revolt against the overwhelming artificiality of the home atmosphere. They were generally at loggerheads with Mrs. Ambrose and her daughter for their unnatural exclusiveness and for making it a life-task to maintain a painfully fashionable style of living to dazzle others. It was quite clear, that while these two ladies were for keeping up unsullied the practice of wealthy Indian Christians of a bygone generation to ape the Occidentals, the two young men were completely under the spell of the new spirit of militant nationalism, which refuses to tolerate all imitation and is in revolt against artificiality in life and manners and customs. Yet not all

their love of liberty and Gospel of nationalism could give them the daring to appear in Indian clothes, especially under the patriarchal roof, or to converse in an Indian vernacular. But Henry and Arthur, however, could not be restrained from emphatically expressing their opinions regarding the humiliation of being ruled by a foreign power and that too by a country which, they said, "boasted of its championship of freedom and exploited the weak under the disguise of a trusteeship". They openly admired the great national leaders and heroes, in a way which used to shock the ladies so much as to cause Mrs. Ambrose to pronounce such words as utter blasphemy.

If, however, the young men had uttered blasphemy against the most high God, I wonder if the Anglicised members of the Ambrose family would have felt any hurt at all. There were no private or family prayers. I never saw a Bible in that house nor anybody going to church. Not that I believe that every one who does these things, leads a Christian life or shows a Christian conduct, but in this family where the outward symbols were altogether absent, one does not expect much reverence for God or religion in their hearts.

At all times of the day, and chiefly in the evenings, visitors would be dropping in and there were tea and refreshments for any number of them. One evening, one Mr. Doss, a lecturer in the State College, called with his wife and two small children. Mr. Doss, a tall spare man, was in

European clothes though not an England-returned man. His wife was small and thin, with a light complexion and good features but looking very weak. She was gorgeously dressed in Parsee fashion without covering her head and wore many delicate gold jewels. Her curly hair was arranged to cover her ears and to play on her broad forehead. The children, a girl and a boy, both fair complexioned looked exactly alike though differing in size and had eyes that shone like twin stars. They wore clothes and hats like English children. There were introductions always, but this one I particularly remember for the reasons you shall know.

"Mr. and Mrs. Doss—Miss Prakasarao, a friend of Baby's." Felicia was the baby of the family. Mrs. Ranjan finished the introduction and after handshakes and courtesies were exchanged, she said to me: "Mr. Doss [is a] lecturer in the college. You heard his address in the Y. M. C. A. the other day?"

Then she left the visitors with me and flitted to another part of the drawing-room to chat with some other friends there. I found that all the local celebrities frequented this house and Mrs. Ranjan received and spoke nicely even to the common people, school-mistresses, lady apothecaries and others. Sometimes the relations of the Ambroses with the circles beneath them smacked a little of condescension and patronage. I observed, however, that but for a casual remark and frequent glances towards them, they did not honour the Dosses with much attention.

The Dosses took leave to go and see Mr. Ambrose senior. Immediately, Mrs. Ranjan left the drawing-room with an apology, and followed them, rather with her arm round Mrs. Doss' waist, actually seemed to usher her into her father's presence. The interview was quickly concluded. The Dosses came back and renewed their conversation with me. I soon found myself liking Mrs. Doss very much.

"Baby, you must bring your friend and spend a day with us. When will it suit you?" Mrs. Doss asked Felicia who had just put in her appearance. "Ask mamma," answered the Baby.

"You can have Miss Prakasarao, but I am afraid Baby will have no time to accept new engagements," answered Mrs. Ranjan for her mother in anticipation of Mrs. Doss' request.

"Why, Gladys, she is not leaving so soon?" Mrs. Doss remonstrated.

"Baby has so many things to attend to and arrange before her departure, Lily. Better be satisfied with Miss Prakasarao, if she consents."

I consented, later on learning to my dismay, that my action was not much to the Ambrose taste. I was longing to escape from the oppressive atmosphere of wealth and luxury and fashion to something more tolerable. I heartily wished that the servants did not so often persecute me for orders to fold up my dresses, polish my shoes and ever so many tasks which I could have gladly done for myself. I had not enough dresses to change even twice a day and

my best clothes were shabby before their gorgeous draperies. I used to feel dreadfully uneasy under the suspicion that when the servants whispered to each other as they handled my dresses they must be discussing my poverty or my plebeian tastes and I would be sure of having detected some titterings.

Sometimes, Dr. Ambrose—Mr. Ambrose Junior—came to see his parents by himself. His wife 'Nellie' an English woman and he made an extreme type of an incongruous pair, he black and flabby and bloated; she white and delicate and ethereal looking. In short, they reminded me of Beauty and the Beast.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT THE DOSES'

WHEN the day of appointment came, Mrs. Doss arrived in a taxi for me. Without getting down, however, she sent the driver to fetch me and I went and joined her in the car. We drove through pleasant streets and arrived at the common gate of two bungalows situated in the same enclosure and full of tall silver oak, cypress and peepuls with two rows of guhl mohur marking off the areas belonging to each house, but not very effectively. In one of these bungalows lived the Dosses, and in the other the Upshons, an Anglo-Indian family. When we approached the gate, we saw the ayah wheeling Prema and Papa in a pram. An older boy, Prabha, with his Anglo-Indian friend, Sonny, was setting off somewhere, both riding the same bike, and Mr. Doss's eldest daughter Padma was fondling a white cherub, Sonny's baby sister in her ayah's arms. The Upshons were a white skinned family. Mr. Doss hearing the horn, came out and before receiving us secured to a tree, a white poodle which was both savagely barking at me and wagging his tail to welcome his mistress.

We all sat in the drawing-room chatting for a while. The style, here too, was far above

anything that I had been used to. Everything about the house was neat and tasteful but still in contrast with the painful luxuries I had left behind, simplicity itself. Here was incomparable relief awaiting me where there was some ease from the intolerable tension in the other house. Peace and freedom seemed to reside here and one could be quite natural once more.

"How do you like Kesarinagar, Miss Parkasarao?" asked Mr. Doss.

"It is a lovely place. I have never seen an Indian capital before. Princes can afford to fill their cities with palaces and light them up like fairyland, I believe," I answered.

"Quite true. You are staying in a palace too. How do you like it?" was his next question and I heartily wished he had not asked that, I could neither describe my true impressions, nor tell a downright lie. So, after a little reflection answered in a non-committal way: "Truly, it is a palace, so grand, so large. The Ambroses must be very rich."

"So you are thoroughly enjoying your visit there?" asked Mrs. Doss watching me critically. Such a pointed question was a cruel cut to me.

I replied: "They are all very nice to me, especially Felicia. But she is dreadfully busy just now."

Mrs. Doss next asked me whether the Ambroses had at any time alluded to any of their relatives in Kesarinagar. I answered, they had not and she said pointing to her husband: "He is Mr. Ambrose's sister's son."

"Ah!" I exclaimed, as if such a thing was anything but possible and remained mute with parted lips. .

"But you noticed, how Gladys introduced me to you? 'Mr. Doss, whose address in the Y. M. C. A., you heard!' when she could have told you I was her cousin," said Mrs. Doss.

"Is Mr. Ambrose, then, your own uncle?" I exclaimed in amazement.

"My mother was his step-sister."

"All the same, they were children of the same father?"

"Same. His mother was the first wife's daughter and this uncle, the second wife's son," said Mrs. Doss and went on. "But my uncle's own children by his first wife are as much strangers under their father's roof, as the nephews and nieces are. Our uncle is completely dominated by Felicia's mother and sister. They are immensely rich and are ashamed to own their poor relatives."

"Are you poor?" I exclaimed in wonder again and what about the children of that house?"

Mr. Doss laughed and remarked: "Oh, you don't understand. The children are step-children to the present Mrs. Ambrose, and that is enough. As for us, what is our income compared to their lakhs? But no matter, if they do not acknowledge the relationship, can't they at least be as nice to us as they are to utter strangers. Do you know Miss Prakasarao, they have not even seen our house, though they and we have always lived here? Yet, Gladys visits the poorest beggars in the

slums, riding in her car, because she is a social worker: my aunt gives us a formal reception, Gladys will be all smiles to Lily for half a minute, enquiring about the children and giving serious advice about their proper up-bringing."

"Always trying to make me confess that my own methods are wrong, but she never cares even to ask to see the children. If I take them there, she won't even notice them. I asked her to drop you here as the chauffeur is likely to know the house, but she said even her driver does not know, and so I had to come in a taxi for you." All this from Mrs. Doss.

Her husband continued where he had left off. "Yes, just half a minute and then she goes to the other visitors and spends all her time chatting with them. We feel very awkward, but if we want to go in and see uncle, under some pretext either the mother or the daughter manage to follow us there and remain on guard during the whole interview."

"But why?" I asked. Perhaps it was uncharitable, unmannerly and inquisitive on my part to wish to hear more to their discredit. But when the story was coming of its own accord, human nature could not resist the temptation.

"Why," laughed Mrs. Doss. "They are afraid, we go to uncle to ask for money. That is their one fear. They worship money."

"But you are not in need of your uncle's help, surely?" I said.

"It's all one to them. They choose to think us all are beggars, and my uncle such a miser too!"

Miss Prakasarao, you cannot imagine, how stingy he is even now. His own thrift, business like ways, added to a stroke of fortune have made a Nawab Sahib of him, but still he is parsimonious," Mrs. Doss said.

Mr. Doss: "They are all stingy except the youngsters. We seldom call on them except to see uncle who has been in very bad health. We do not as a rule take the children there, because they are not welcome. Now and then, at Christmas time, or at a birthday, they give parties to children. They invite even the children of the low class Christians, children of hospital nurses, petty school-mistresses and everybody, but they never ask for Prabha or Padma. They give toys and presents to the children of strangers, but not a rubber doll to our kids."

I did notice when the Dosses called, school teachers, nurses, and others in low circumstances receiving more courtesy at the hands of the Ambroses than the Dosses, but then I had not known these were relatives. During my brief reflection, a European or Anglo-Indian young man entered. After the greetings, Mr. Doss said: "Padma is going to have her music lesson now. Do you mind our going to my wife's sitting-room, Miss Prakasarao?"

I was quite prepared to go anywhere. "So, this is the music master!" I thought as I followed the Dosses out of the drawing-room.

"Miss Prakasarao, if you will kindly excuse me, I shall leave you with Lily and go out for

about an hour. I have some urgent business to look to."

In the boudoir the same topic was continued by Mrs. Doss. Sounds from the piano began to break on the air and it was not pleasant to hear Padma's novice fingers striking the same set of notes over and over again. I was, however, much amused, when Dr. Ambrose passed under review. I was just beginning to understand that Mrs. Ambrose and her daughter were immensely proud of "Nellie", for it was always, "My daughter-in-law is an English lady," or "My sister-in-law is an English lady", with them, and they had in contemplation more English ladies for Henry and the other sons, though I had my own doubts regarding Henry's tastes. What Mrs. Doss had to tell me about her cousin the doctor, was highly entertaining.

"He is naturally fond of curry and rice, but he can't take that before his wife. So they have English food at home in their own house, but Walter takes a second dinner served by his mother on the sly, when he calls alone during his rounds."

"But," I said, extremely puzzled, "they have only English courses there too, and I used to wonder whether they were really satisfied with only a small helping of curry and rice!"

"Oh dear," she answered, "they keep up a style like that to impress their guests. They have a private dining room in the kitchen suite where they take their fill of pilau, hot dishes and everything they want. It is the guests unaccustomed to English diet who must starve, not they."

She laughed, but I did not. Not because I might be thought rude, but I was seriously reflecting on the necessity for pretension on the part of those who had everything they could wish for. We pretended in order to identify ourselves with Brahmins; they were pretending in order to form a special circle with their English connections.

Mrs. Doss showed me round the house. She explained to me the working of the electric stove over which they cooked their meals, also the means by which electricity would keep the dishes warm till use in the cupboard. A maid was busy scraping cocoanut, another was turning something over the fire. By this time Padma's instruction was over and Mr. Doss too had returned, followed by a man carrying on his head the purchases, fruits, vegetables and other things, in a hamper. While the mistress of the house went to supervise the cooking, we had light refreshments and the master invited me to play bridge with Prabha and Padma. I saw several kinds of indoor games all of which were very interesting.

When the bell summoned us to breakfast, it was really like breaking a long fast for me, the table being loaded with so many nice things. It seemed an age since I had tasted proper Indian food. I thoroughly relished the curries and was really thankful to the Dosses for giving me the chance. I stayed to tea and returned to my friends, a little wiser than before.

All these days, Felicia was not much of a company for me, because of the numerous engagements she had before her departure and partly

too of my reluctance to follow her—she was seldom at home—into the whirl of her social activities to which both by nature and upbringing I was a total stranger. However, during the intervals which she could spend with me, she used to honour me with her confidences. Once she told me very confidentially :

"Mamma and Gladys are so intolerant in their outlook that I dread to consult them regarding any of my pet plans. Believe me, Meena, I have no love for all this artificiality with which we have cursed ourselves, but I have got to please the folks. There was a time when English names and costumes and an English style of living really meant much for people who cared for a position, but our Indian Renaissance has over and above all other things, exposed the falsity and hollowness of such a position. Now it is the Indian simplicity that stands out in all its solid dignity of non-affectation. In its atmosphere, artificiality and ostentation must reveal themselves in all their ridiculous nature. I say, how lucky for you to have been given an Indian name. I am awfully ashamed of mine, and don't like to be known by it in England. Now, dear, help me to choose a nice Indian name."

"Sita is my favourite," I answered.

"A strange coincidence," she said, "that happens to be my favourite one too."

"Then it is settled," I said.

Felicia was thoughtful and she smiled vaguely, playing with the diamond studded swastika pendant of her chain as she sat on the edge of my cot.

"What's up?" I asked.

"Some one, once called me Devi and I had hoped you would suggest that," she softly answered, as if I could guess what was in her mind.

"How, you thought I was a mind reader?" I asked. "Out with your secret you sly puss. Who was it that called you Devi? Why did you ask me to choose your name, then?"

"Oh, there are secrets which I am not at liberty to tell even you. But what do you think of that name?"

"That's a beautiful one and I should not find it difficult to put the two together and call you, Sita Devi."

"Capital," cried Felicia as she jumped to her feet from the cot. "You are a genius, child. From now on I am Sita Devi and not the disgusting Felicia. It is so odious——."

"But I like your present name very much," I said. "It is the name of a famous woman too."

"Felicia Hemans," said she curling her lip in scorn. "She wrote 'The boy stood on the burning deck.' It was all very well for her to have that name. She did not shine in borrowed plumes like me. Perhaps Mamma thought, I would be a poetess too some day."

After my return from the Dosses, Felicia was able to spend some time with me. Almost the first question she asked was: "Did Lily tell you she was my cousin?"

"Well—well—ah—" I stammered hesitating to give out the Dosses. "I suppose, that was the impression I had from the conversation."

"Yes, we are very close relatives," she answered in a matter-of-fact way. "But this artificiality keeps us distant. Among Indians, one man may be an international celebrity, his next brother may be a lawyer's clerk, but not only do they never think of concealing the relationship, but even live under the same roof as members of a joint family. I do not see any dignity in hiding what is a fact."

I thought it prudent not to venture a remark. Felicia went on: "Henry is the incarnation of modern nationalism. He simply can't tolerate all this fetish about imitating Westerners. He is contemplating to change not only his Christian name, but also the family name. You see, the name of our ancestor who became a Christian was Ekambarum, conveniently changed into Ambrose. Henry is for going back to be Ekambaram."

"Interesting," I smiled.

Felicia would not think of my leaving, till I had stayed on for her mother's birthday. And well it was that I postponed my departure,—according to my then idea when my sky had still a rosy streak on it, for I saw something which I had never seen before. There was a grand dinner for several guests seated at many tables and representing all castes and creeds, Hindu, Muslim, Indian Christian and Anglo-Indian all munching bacon, sandwiches and drinking champagne as if they had been born to it. I was

forced to taste some champagne too, and I cannot say, how intoxicated and faint² I felt for that. A dance was on the programme, and I saw with astonishment many fashionable Indian girls, Felicia among them, being led off by men and reeling on the carpeted floor. As a spectator, however, I enjoyed the items except the dance which amused me not a little. The music nevertheless stirred my soul and made me dream. Henry out of courtesy asked me for a dance, but when I confessed my ignorance in unsophisticated language, led off Celia and then danced with some more of the Houris present.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MY RETURN JOURNEY

DURING the return journey I had taken a different route and having had to change at one of the principal junctions, made for the ladies' waiting-room there to wait for my train. Whom should I see in the waiting-room but Miss Parsons? She was just the same as when I had met her last, at Madanapalle, the same bob, the same blackheads, the same everything, even to the transforming smile, the soul reflecting eyes, and the same anxiety to say or do things to keep the company pleasantly occupied, and withal the same wistfulness now and then unwarily manifesting itself, thus showing a heart, with an infinite capacity for something unfulfilled. With her, there was another young lady, not tall, but a vision of loveliness, a beauty of the gentle dignified type, and it would have taken all the world to guess, that this incongruous pair were sisters, children of the same parents! Phyllis, as Miss Parsons addressed her sister, was like the Roman or Spanish beauties, one sees in coloured pictures. Though her bob was quite modern, it was not visible, for while Miss Parsons had allowed her hair to tumble about her forehead and ears, like a mop, her sister

had gathered it all under a purple silk scarf which draped her shapely head and fell in a fringe on her back. From under that scarf, some black raven locks played on the beautiful, cream-white forehead, and the long black eyebrows making two sweeping arches enhanced the mystery of those limpid pools of the dark eyes. The straight fine nose, the beautiful curve of the mouth, the well defined jaws and the perfect contour of the blooming cheeks made her a sight not often surpassed. Her pink dress seemed to coquet with her fine ankles, unlike the ungraceful cut of Miss Parson's skirts. In that simple robe, without a single jewel or ornament, this girl was a feast for any eye. If anything was wanting to complete the contrast between the two sisters, it was the reticence of Phyllis, before the conversational genius of her sister.

As I was approaching the waiting-room followed by a coolie carrying my luggage, I found the two sisters seated on a sofa, Miss Parsons watching the streams of passengers on the platform, the fingers of her hands clasping her knees playing a tattoo to the tune she was softly humming, and her sister half reclining, absorbed in a railway guide-book, the pages of which she was turning over. The fleeting, almost unobserving glance that Miss Parsons ran over the passengers, who passed within her range of vision, rested longer on me and became a fixed wondering stare. Her humming and tattoo stopped forthwith. Phyllis, who at the time was evidently not more interested in the passengers than in her guide, however looked up

when her sister rose in a flurry exclaiming: "Why, it is none other than Meena! To think of meeting you, here, dear! Did you' drop from the clouds, child?"

I clasped the hand she gave me, and answered all her questions, my eyes however rudely staring at the vision on the sofa. Phyllis transferred her attention to the book again and lay there as an angel.

"This is Phyllis, my sister—Miss Prabha——." Miss Parsons was looking distressed for the failure of her memory. I went to her rescue and said, "Miss Prakasarao".

"Exactly—Miss Prakasarao. How stupid of me! I get confused with all the names beginning with Pra—"

Phyllis rose, her book in her left hand, while her right sought mine as she greeted me sweetly with a "Glad to meet you".

Nothing could have surpassed my rudeness, when without a forethought, I exhibited my surprise and said: "Your sister!" That was neither the first nor the last time, I have behaved with such bad manners.

"Yes, my sister," answered Miss Parsons with her usual laugh. "Not so plain looking as I am, of course. Now, Phyllis, I guess you've got good company now. You see Meena, she was insisting on travelling in the females' third, and not in the Anglo-Indian reserved compartment, feeling sort of funky without being sure of company. But the females' compartment with illiterate women and babies is dreadfully dirty and uncomfortable.

Now that you are here, the two of you can travel in the reserved, since you are going the same way.

"But I am not an Anglo-Indian and I should not like to be insulted by the railway authorities," I replied.

"They don't object if they see educated ladies at all. Besides, there is Phyllis. No alarm at all, child. She can't afford a higher class as, it is a long journey, part of the time on foreign railways. For her meals and all, a crammed third class carriage would be very uncomfortable and she absolutely refuses to take the Anglo-Indian carriage unless she is quite sure of company. I am sure there will be no trouble of any kind for you, for wearing a saree instead of a gown."

"It would be a pleasure for me to travel with your sister, but I am not going all the way with her."

Phyllis had not taken much part in the conversation, though she was following our discussion with a nod or a smile now and then. "It is enough if she passes to-night in your company. After you leave her it will only be day travelling. Now, isn't funny, that you and I meet each other sort of unexpectedly every time, Meena? I am wondering where the next meeting would be. Another cup, boy."

The last words were addressed to the waiter who had brought two cups of tea in a tray which he laid on the table. The two sisters left the sofa and went to the table inviting me to take tea with them. Miss Parsons gave one cup

to her sister and one to me, and waited for her own. I was not a little inquisitive as to the object of Phyllis's journey, but every time I tried to think of a suitable way to open the topic Miss Parsons would introduce something else, in order to prevent our being bored by oppressive silence so that the question that many a time had almost trembled on my lips, was unasked. After tea was over, the sisters went to the toilet. I declined their invitation and sat watching the passengers, railway workers, the traffic, and all the other interesting sights of a big railway junction. Their toilet over, the sisters busied themselves opening suit-cases, packing away the things they had been using, and re-arranging the articles and getting everything ready for the move. Just before our train was signalled, the coolies trooped into the room to bear our things to the train.

There were a number of Anglo-Indian passengers in the compartment reserved for them, but one and all got down at this junction and the carriage was empty. We were the only passengers to get in. Railway officials passed to and fro several times and they all saw me, but said nothing. The reason for my extreme nervousness was due to the usual experiences of Indians at the hands of the railway hat-wallahs. Any brown or black fellow or woman, however shabby, with an English costume on, thought it an outrage to have an Indian as a fellow passenger, however superior to them the Indian might be in education and means, and even colour. They protested in a

most unseemly way and the railway authorities took up their part. The Anglo-Indians are now doing all they can to merge in the Indian millions, but till they were quite sure that the post-War constitutional changes would do away with their special privileges, they were constantly alienating the children of India with their superior airs. My brothers were always at loggerheads with the railway officials. Davy, especially for the sake of creating trouble, would choose to travel in the Anglo-Indian reserved. If he were asked to clear out, he would demand for a definition of the term Anglo-Indian and ask, whether the symbol was a one-rupee eight anna hat from the Moore Market, or the ability to speak "Butler English", that was the hall-mark of an Anglo-Indian. My brothers being men were used to the give and take of the business, and could stand rough treatment, but I was only a woman and made of a different fibre, hating to break rules, however foolish, and detesting an argument above all things. However, all is well that ends well, and it was so in my case now. Either those particular railway officials were more civil and enlightened, or because they saw that Phyllis did not object to my company, they did not interfere.

I was the first to get in and settle down, but until the train started, the two sisters stood talking together a little apart. Then came the bell, the whistle, and the green flag, followed by a last embrace and kiss between the two sisters, and Phyllis got in. A hand shake with Miss Parsons, many "Bye-byes", and as the train puffed out

of the station-yard, waving of kerchiefs till Miss Parsons was out of sight, and we were alone together. Phyllis had the same, entrancing smile for me, whenever I spoke to her or she caught me looking at her. I found it very difficult to keep my eyes off that lovely vision, and often stole glances at her. I have always been an undisguised admirer of beauty in all its shapes and colours and sounds and sentiments, and often the way my mind reacted, smacked of the primitive, since, for the moment, I was unconscious of even offending some who were too polite to appear noticing my bad manners. Then to cover up my folly I have made matters worse, by subsequently trying to place a far-fetched construction on my action.

We did manage to have some conversation, though, how it began cannot be accounted for now, as I was always at a loss how to break the ice, and Phyllis did not seem to be much gifted in the way of conversation. But when two people are thrown upon each other's sole company, some trite and commonplace thing is sure to give an opportunity. Be it what it may, Phyllis and I soon found ourselves enlightening each other as to the object of our journeys and whence we came. She told me that in reply to her answering a certain advertisement, she had obtained appointment as a governess in the family of an Indian aristocrat, and that she was on her way to join her post.

"But isn't Gotirtam too far from home for you, Miss Parsons?" I asked. "Perhaps, you have relatives or friends there."

Her voice was soft and she always spoke slowly, not rattling away like her sister, and she answered: "Far from home? Yes, somewhat. But that job has a special attraction for me. The family is going abroad, and I am to accompany them. That gives me a chance to see Europe and quite possibly to take some technical training in England."

We were silent for a while, which I spent admiring her profile, as she looked out of the carriage window. Then out came, one of my foolish, naive remarks: "You do remind me of a Parsee lady, with that silk scarf round your head. I mean, if one does not particularly notice your frock. How do you like the idea of a saree, Miss Parsons? I am sure it would suit you to perfection."

She simply smiled and said: "Oh, I love sarees", with a world of emphasis on the word, love. "Only, we are not allowed to wear them. But I am not going to wear frocks in England, you know. There, I will have only sarees. They are such dear lovely things." She was silent for a while and then said: "Stella wore sarees only, in England."

I knew, Miss Parsons Senior had saved what she could and had gone to England on a Government scholarship for higher studies, but I had no idea that she had discarded the gown there, that symbol of the ruling class in India, and had taken to a saree, the costume of the subject class.

"Then why does she wear gowns again," I asked with that incorrigible curiosity of mine.

"You see, Miss Prakasarao," she answered, "in India, it is an outrage to our community, if any member goes in for a saree, but over there in England, any coloured person wearing a gown is taken for a Negro. Anglo-Indians over there would rather be called Indians, wearing the Indian dress, than be called niggers in European clothes."

"What a difference in outlook between an enlightened Anglo-Indian and a narrow-minded one!" I exclaimed to myself, "and what a rude shock to the community, which in India despises the 'Native' and identifies itself with the ruling class to find that, in England, the pure-blooded Indian is more respected than the mixed one."

At one of the stations, Phyllis gave the order for dinner to be handed in at the next principal halting place. By now, I had completely understood her reluctance to travel by herself in the Anglo-Indian third. There was not an Anglo-Indian chap on any of the platforms anywhere, who did not stare rudely at Phyllis and find some excuses to pass her window again and again, whistling or humming an air, and making a point to look in if the young lady did not happen to be near the window. Whenever the train stopped, the chief guard did the same, eyeing her impudently, as his duty took him along the whole length of the train from the engine to the brake-van. When Phyllis spoke to the guard about her dinner, something occurred that caused me

to modify my habit of associating loveliness with helplessness.

"How far are you going?" the guard asked her politely and my companion made a courteous reply.

"Going for a holiday, I believe: coming back on this line again?" This time he was making for intimacy. Her eyes flashed daggers, as she answered: "That is none of your business to ask." With a queenly toss of her beautiful head, Phyllis turned her face away from the window and buried her looks in the railway guide. "Beauty can stab," I reflected, and then the full meaning of her repugnance to travel alone dawned on me. And how much more regal was the beauty with the flush of indignation on her countenance! Some are born queens, and Phyllis undoubtedly was one, no matter who her father and mother were.

CHAPTER XXXV

A MEMORABLE TOUR

MY visit to Felicia marks the end of one of the epochs of my life, which began with my mother's return. All the sorrow, all the shame, all the humiliation, no matter under what camouflage they had been disguised, whether the wealth we had possessed, or the empty boast of a superior caste that we never had, or the genius we had to tell lies, or whatever it may be, had done its part in giving the tragedy a whitewashing; the circumstances themselves seemed to be receding into half oblivion. Youth asserted itself, and I had allowed day-dreams to take their course unfettered, loved admiration and went in for gaieties.

I will not say, that while I was actually going through these pleasant experiences, I realized or even felt a presentiment that that was the happiest period of my life and that darker days than I had ever known so far, were in store for me. The heart-ache was never absent, cruelly gripping me whenever the outer world slackened its own hold, that is whenever I was by myself. There was yet another thing that made peace unalloyed impossible, to a deeply susceptible nature like mine. In the midst of some keen

enjoyment, something in me would rebuke my abandon, although the particular pleasure might be nothing worse than a joy ride, a night at the pictures, a holiday amidst a people who had no use for God,—all such things would suddenly lower my spirits to the freezing point as it were.

Further, the family reunion could never undo the tragedy. Repentance could reconcile us to God, the loving, the merciful, but the world insists on remembering and vigorously publishing the guilt of the sinner. Had we not done the same to others even at the time we were weltering in our guilt? An individual whose close fellowship with God has brought about a meekness of spirit, does not set any value on any honour or prestige that the world can give, and is quite happy with the sense of being at peace with his Heavenly Father. But to us, who never allowed God to direct our thoughts and words and deeds, though we honoured Him with our lips, and to whom a worldly reputation was the chief concern, and the world's goods, the objects worth wearing out a life to possess to us, the skeleton in the family cupboard was the nightmare. People such as we cannot afford to criticize, judge or condemn others, without receiving our own share in the same measure. We maligned others and they did not spare us. There was re-union only of a sort, far from complete and farther from healing the old wounds. The much-wronged husband had actually forgiven the treacherous wife, and received her back when she returned. But his domineering nature, his irritable temper and his belief in his own infallibility

remained the same, and my mother's hatred had not softened a whit even out of gratitude. She was too old to torture him with a renewal of her old time much dreaded threat of leaving home, for no lover cared for her any longer, but she did all else that she could to nurse the old bitterness and to intensify it. She grumbled and groused criticizing everything, finding fault with everything and never rested or wearied from filling her children's ears with her abuses of their father. I was the one specially selected by her to hear her everlasting complaints. The home was not even full of the youngsters who under many vicissitudes had grown up together sharing the same joys and sorrows, hopes and fears. Emmie was an exile, Mary was married and was with her husband, Davy had settled down with his own family, Sophie had closed her eyes upon all the earthly scenes of her life, Harry was in far away Iraq, and it was only Willie, who was helping uncle at the stores at Sunderkote, and I, who went there as to our only home. Even when he and the others came occasionally, our visits seldom coincided. When all these things are said, the fact remains that the restored home had no power to cure my heart-ache, but it does seem a paradox to confess that if ever there was a happy time in my life, it was this, though I could not have believed it then. And little did I dream, that the next cruel blow for me was waiting at my journey's end.

They knew that I was arriving that day. As the train steamed into the station, in

vain did I look out from the window, scanning the faces on the platform for a sight of my father's. It was a terrible disappointment. The train stopped, I summoned a cooly, got down and taking leave of Phyllis made for the gate. When I approached the house, I was surprised to see many people there. I entered it and found some of my uncles and aunts, my brothers and Mary. It was then with a sinking heart I learnt that father was very ill. He had had a stroke, telegrams had been sent all round; I missed mine, as I was on the train.

I ran to my father's bed-side. He was unconscious. Who can understand what it is to return home and find that father cannot open his eyes and see you, open his lips and speak to you one word of comfort? Father, down and helpless, the man who dominated all other lives! Prostrate! It was, as if all of a sudden, the foundations of the universe had given way. A sense of unutterable awe and destitution overwhelmed me. I did not realize what I was doing; when sinking on my knees beside the bed I moaned calling on father to open his eyes and speak to me. I was his favourite always and grief was wringing my heart.

Somebody announced that I was wanted by my mother. She was in the kitchen when I saw her, holding steaming hot coffee in a blue enamel tumbler in one hand and 'upma' in a saucer in the other—not a trace of grief on those hardened features, not even sympathy for the child's grief.

"You must be very tired after such a long journey. Here, have your coffee first and then take your bath and change your dress," she said scrutinizing my tear-stained face with a look of emphatic disapproval.

"I haven't done my toilet yet; I shall go and fetch my tooth paste and brush," I answered and was turning to go.

We usually used either fine charcoal powder or neem twigs to clean the teeth, but as I had been on a tour and spending a holiday in high society, I had bought a prophylactic tooth brush and a tube of Listerine tooth paste, as part of my travelling kit.

"You are a foolish girl to make all this fuss. Are not all people born to die? Some time I am going to die, and so are you. I do not understand why people should weep their eyes out—and he is still alive."

As she said this, she put away the coffee and refreshment, and reaching out a neem twig and a chembu of water said: "Here, do your toilet with these, take your coffee and go and have some rest first. There is plenty of time to watch and weep. He will never miss you, and he will linger some time more. Such a wretchedly small house; I can't find a place where to make your bed, without a dozen people disturbing your rest. I begged him to take a larger house, but his niggardliness—and then the perverse delight he used to take in thwarting my wishes!"

With the husband who had taken her back when the world had cast her off, and when

nowhere else she could find a roof, or respectability, except under his protection, with that man on his death-bed, such unfeelingness in my own mother hurt me more than the remorse that tortured me for having been away enjoying life, while my father was stricken down never to rise again. Was my comfort of more consequence than that of the sick man?

I hurried through my toilet and coffee, and took my bath and tried to take rest. But what rest with fire coursing through every vein? Mary, too, distracted in the management of her naughty and noisy children, was of very little use either in nursing father or helping mother in the kitchen. Davy had just killed a pigeon and was massaging father's limbs with the warm blood. The floor was littered with heaps of the medicinal herb which had been used for hot fomentation the preceding night. Davy left the day after my arrival as he was much too worried about his erring wife's safety, to stay a little longer.

Davy was always suspicious regarding Hema's character, and she too had given him ample proof of her infidelity, so that he had taken upon himself to act the policeman towards her, and it was the best evidence of his affection towards his father, that he had started immediately on the receipt of the telegram, making some makeshift arrangement for the safety of his wife and children. Now, he was impatient to return, promising to come back if there was a turn for the worse in the patient.

A few days passed. Others kept arriving till the house looked like a steamer passenger-shed for emigration coolies. It was impossible to give the patient a room for himself, and he was not in a condition to be moved to a better place, but he was mercifully unconscious of all the noise, overcrowding and discomfort. The strain, however, began to tell on those who were watching him. The slightest hope would have rendered any ordeal bearable, but no such hope was held out by the doctors. Still human yearning could not harden our hearts to slacken the measures for trying to restore him. Those were days of a horrible dream, but they came to an end. Father had another stroke on New Moon day and breathed his last without ever recovering consciousness. But before the sense of the irreparable loss could be realized, the first feeling was one of immense relief. The strenuous labours of night and day, which had almost broken down some of us, had suddenly ceased, and we felt as if there was no use for our hands or brains any more. It was like floating on the air. No more need for massages, spoon-feeding, changing his clothes and cleaning his bed and such services.

It was relief in more ways than one. It had brought peace at long last to the one who by his extraordinary ideas had driven it from his own home and would give it no chance to return. There were times when he was more prepared to take out his own life at the failure of his plans or authority, than to relax an inch of his severity. At least, he ought to have known that even if

all things were lawful all things were not expedient. I have lived long enough to see, that the woes and afflictions of the world are not all the outcome of the evil deeds of acknowledged evil-doers; for the fanatical acts of intolerant individuals, persons of the one-track mind, who refuse to respect or even recognize other points of view than their own can also make the world a hell to all concerned. My father saw all his plans frustrated but he had run his unhappy race and found rest in the grave.

His death was an indescribable relief to the survivors, in that it ended the long and fierce vendetta between father and mother—a vendetta in which the children's sufferings are known only to their Heavenly Father, not to speak of the devastating effect on our developing characters, of such ungodly bickerings and such unholy examples. My mother had not the grace at least to refrain from openly demonstrating her dislike for my father even during the last days of his life. She was pitiless to the end. Her hands never ministered to him when he was sick or dying. She never even cared to step into the sick-room except when she used it as a passage. On the other hand, she was exceedingly suspicious of foul play on the part of my uncles with regard to my father's personal savings as well as his share of my grandfather's property, and gave no end of lectures to Davy to have an eye in that direction. She confided to me a thousand conjectures regarding his will and the Life Insurance money. She was seated in an easy chair when my

father passed away, and as soon as she heard the news, she sat up and snapped the thali thread. This thread with its gold pendant tied round the bride's neck by the groom at the time of marriage was the symbol of marriage like the wedding ring. According to the old fashioned custom when death parted the couple, the elders of the family performed a ceremony and some old lady solemnly cut the string some days after the funeral. My mother's impatience could be imagined when without considering what the others might think, she would not suffer the bond of her union with a hated husband to stand for a moment after life was extinct in his body. But the struggle had come to an end at last—a struggle in which by the momentary desire to punish each other with reprisals, father and mother had made the very remembrance of their childhood and youth, a terror to the children.

CHAPTER XXXVI

HARRY COMES BACK

AUNT Kezia wanted to take me away, but my mother would not think of my continued adoption by my aunt. This led to a misunderstanding, which, however, was successfully tided over, by a little concession on either side. My mother herself going away with Davy, she consented to my spending a few weeks with aunty, till I should get a job, when she could come and stay with me.

While I was at Sunderkote, I heard the glad news that Harry had not only acknowledged the letter conveying him the news of father's death, but had also intimated, that he was starting to return home. If I had only dreamt, what his coming back would mean, I would have heartily wished my brother in a grave by the Euphrates. He had always been a bully, bent upon having the last word in an argument, for the triumph of his cleverness of speech rather than for the triumph of truth. Not only was his own life far from godliness, but he did his best to corrupt whomsoever he could with his own irreverence to everything holy. He taught innocent children to relish and enjoy vulgar and filthy jokes, indecent songs and ribaldry, to disobey their parents in secret, holding out to them that

trespass did not constitute a serious sin. His own life might be unprincipled, without respect for God's law or man's, but I used to ask myself: "What right had Harry to mislead others, and innocent children of all?" There are evil forces enough in the world to present innumerable obstacles to every man and woman in the battle of life. If a brother man cannot lift a finger to help them along or give them one word of encouragement in choosing the path of truth and righteousness, it would be far more heroic on his part to leave them to struggle alone than to mislead them, and bear the guilt of their going astray. When it comes to their corrupting young, innocent and trusting children, whose characters for all life are made or marred in their growing years, by the ideals and examples set before them, it would be far better for such a traitor, that he plunge into the sea, as Christ says, with a mill-stone round his neck than misguide one little child. A man may express righteous indignation for the wrongs of his country in no uncertain terms, but the deadliest wrong any of his compatriots may ever suffer, he may be inflicting on his own blood-brother.

Harry prided himself on his muscular—not moral, note—strength and with a great deal of bravado challenged any man for a duel with him, and mocked those who declined to measure their prowess against his, as cowardly and effeminate, but I saw that this same valiant hero shrank from doing his vile acts openly, and dreaded to face the light of truth. He believed that the

grandest thing in the world was to be a soldier, and strike terror into the hearts of those who opposed him. His courage, however, consisted not in confessing some dastardly deed of his own, but in fiercely denying it and threatening to murder those who accused him of it, knowing all the while that he had done the wicked thing, and that he was the liar and not they. Once in a way, he even went to church, sometimes read the Bible, and occasionally prayed. All the same, he had nothing but ridicule for church-goers, for preachers and anything religious. As far as possible, he avoided associating himself with earnest and devoted men and women, who honoured God, both in their lives and conduct. I felt, that in his own opinion, the vicious influence he exerted over other lives was more to their benefit, than the holy influence of godly people, who seek to help others to steer their own course safely by the chart of God. To Harry, if he committed a deadly wrong against his brother man, it was of no consequence; but the healing and comfort, a man of God could offer to the broken down in body, mind and spirit, in Christ's name, was folly, fit only to be laughed at. What mattered to Harry was not the sin itself, but the detection of it. He could bear to see the moral sufferings of the world, could without pangs add his own contribution to the sin and shame of the world, but he could not tolerate, anybody trying to rescue, one soul from going the way, of an earthly hell—let alone the condition of the soul in a life hereafter.

Often and often, I had wished, that Harry's heart had been the target of some Turkish bullet, and that he had never returned and infected his own family with his own moral leprosy. I cannot describe all the circumstances. Harry came to Bhavanipur, naturally, because mother was there. His attitude towards Hema, in Davy's presence was politeness itself. But in his brother's absence, he was in the habit of cutting coarse jokes with his sister-in-law, uttering ribaldry, and coquetting with Hema, pulling her plait and acting in a way, which he had not the courage to do before Davy. I was more than once prompted to put a bullet into his heart, with his own gun, into my brother's heart! My mother to whom Davy would make endless complaints about Hema's frailty, was ready to accept any story true or false of her daughter-in-law's compromising with any other man in the world, but she was utterly blind to her own son's questionable familiarity with his sister-in-law. At last, it happened. I doubt, if that was the first time, but this time I knew what it was. It was broad daylight too.

Harry had been a voracious reader of Sherlock Holmes, Poe's Tales and other detective novels. One of the things that he learnt from them was, that what is done without elaborate secrecy, is the least open to suspicion. There is the story of the Purloined Letter in Poe's Tales. The man who stole it had left it conspicuously in the room like a crumpled piece of waste paper, and the myrmidons of Paris searching even the crevices and cracks of the furniture, missed the document

lying so openly before their eyes. This story I had heard only from Harry's lips. Now he had adopted a method similar to it for his own dastardly crime. One of Harry's pet theories which he freely discussed with his sister-in-law was that when a woman had lost her chastity, it did not matter which man might have her. Acting on these shameful principles he had defiled his own brother's home. Davy was camping, mother was at her bath, and the children were small. But Harry had reckoned without me. In any case what could I do? He was such a bully. His crime, never at any time troubled him; but it was another person's suspicion, or rebuke or advice that he could not tolerate, and he would thunder out his protests and threats. I could not even warn Davy, for fear that he would either murder one of the guilty pair or kill himself. With a deadly guilt on his soul, Harry continued to live under his brother's roof as an innocent man.

Man's depravity can reach limits at which even brute beasts would shrink. The man who corrupts the young and faltering, with his own false philosophy, that goodness is only a rare, antiquated and profitless articles fit only for the weak, and that sensual abandon is the natural order of the world, argues that if ever God punished mankind for such trivial things, all the concentrated, accumulated sins of one brief lifetime cannot possibly deserve an eternity of hell. But I have seen many a false philosopher like that, suffer the tortures and torments of hell fire in this life

only, when another man has practised that philosophy on himself. Till he was married, Davy had held this theory. Nothing that he said or did, was free from sensuality. He always hankered after girls and young women even if the latter happened to be married, and preferred their company to that of individuals of his own sex. Really, even if God's long suffering providence continues to give unrepentant sinners a chance, their dirty acts bring about their own Nemesis.

It was a well known fact in the family, that Davy had violated Hema's modesty by abusing the interviews he was permitted to have with her and on that account chiefly, the marriage was a forced one to some extent. If a woman yields to the persecution of one man, it was not likely that she would resist the importunities of another equally unscrupulous. He had broken down her integrity and could not repair it again. Davy had likewise in his youth, instilled vicious ideas into Harry's mind when he used his brother as his disciple and lieutenant in all his questionable schemes, during the years when he had sowed his wild oats. Was it a wonder then, that Harry practised on his own brother, the philosophy he had acquired from Davy? And yet these suffer, these soul-less wretches who mocking at holiness, and instead of healing a wound that they find, inflict wrongs and injuries on others. Their theories and philosophies give them no comfort or solace, when their own homes are defiled. Davy's vigilant watchfulness had availed him nothing,

though he has never known his own brother's treachery. If he had relaxed his severity towards Hema, he might have been a happier man. What he brought about by the work of his own hands he imputed to the rulings of inexorable destiny. A person with such an attitude is beyond all mortal help, for he refuses to be convinced that an all-seeing and all-caring God had the power to order things in a better way, by changing even hardened hearts, if he himself abandoned trying to do what was beyond his scope and cast his burden on his Maker. Davy would ask with better cynicism: "Then what about the sufferings of the saints? Why does God allow such tribulations to overtake those who have surrendered everything into His keeping? On the other hand, it is the righteous who suffer most in the world."

Very well, Davy was beyond all human assistance. He never knew, and in those days I never knew, that whatever afflictions may come to those who are God-guided, the troubles but serve to draw them closer to God and they have a peace that passeth all understanding so that they rejoice in their afflictions and do not complain. On the other hand, according to Davy's own argument, if trusting God so completely did not often prevent troubles, could his reliance on himself prevent tragedies? Those who lead surrendered lives do not use repressive measures, or unnatural restraint, nor are they, interfering, vindictive or anything which are not God's own methods of winning souls. There is all the difference in the

world between the mental repose of those who feel that God is their strength and the mental confusion of those who have no such comfort.

If God could not keep Hema from erring, what device that Davy could conceive would restrain her from going astray? God cannot rescue or help a person against that individual's own will and consent. God at least can change a heart, while man with his wrath and his reprisals alienates it the more. Davy did not even keep his private affairs to himself. There was never a time in his life, when he was not pouring his grievances into other people's ears. His constant complaints against Hema, mostly, and also against everybody with whom he had a friction was the dominant feature in the make-up of his character. And yet he would scorn any advice that suggested he might alter his own policy and attitude towards those he was eternally accusing and vilifying. He wanted everybody to hold that he was always in the right, and the others always in the wrong. In the case of Hema, he would not even permit her to defend herself. Who in heaven or earth could help such a man or whence could he obtain peace of mind?

Willie came as soon as he received my letter giving an inkling of Harry's misconduct. He arrived as if on one of his ordinary visits, without appearing to suspect or watch Harry. Willie detected something else, that had passed my own observation. It was Harry's practice to go out regularly in the evenings, for a walk as he used to say, and we believed him.

After Willie's arrival, Harry would solicit his brother's company on the walk. Once Willie gave some excuse to stay at home, but after giving a fair start to his brother, slipped out on the latter's trail. He stole back unsuspected long before Harry's return and pretended to have been busy all the time cleaning his gun and mending his fishing rod. The result of Willie's detective excursion was the discovery that Harry was a drunkard and that his daily outings were to the public house and that the latter's invitation to Willie had been only to make himself sure how Willie was going to spend the evening. Willie was, however, more than a match to the drunkard.

Willie confided this discovery to me and on various pleas got uncle Luke to give an urgent summons to Harry to Sunderkote and after the traitor left, Willie himself hurried to Madras, and after a week of what Herculean labours, I do not know, got some folks in high office to see that the remaining part of Harry's leave was cancelled. Not only was Harry recalled, but in a short while ordered to Quetta. My mother wept at the thought of his going away so far again, and Davy, who never knew his wrongs in this direction, expressed his deep concern not only for the cancellation of the leave, but also for Harry's being posted to such a distance. I rejoiced, that there would be one crime the less in the world. If Harry had only known my sense of relief at his own misfortune, he would have hated me for the rest of his life—not for his ghastly sin against his brother, but because I interfered.

TIMMARAYAHALI HOSPITAL

I received orders to Timmarayahali, where residence in the hospital was compulsory. I had at long last obtained my independence, no longer being the bone of contention between my mother and aunt, but it was at a great cost not anticipated. I cannot say, whether my experiences would have been less bitter otherwise, but when I found Miranda Ephraim on the nursing staff, I scented trouble. Miranda, the younger daughter of Mrs. Ephraim, who hated me under the impression that I was getting better offers than her own daughter, Christina, and indulged in her malice to her heart's content, when she poisoned the mind of Rudran's mother against me: Miranda, the spy and eavesdropper of Sigripore!

The Superintendent was one Miss Zephania a kind and considerate person on the whole, but not proof to tale-bearing. I was the second doctor and there was one junior to me, by name Mrs. Savariyan, a widow, Why she conceived a violent dislike to me from the outset, is more than I can ever tell. She managed to have the matron Miss Gates on her side and between them both, they made life a hell for me. Half the number of nurses were their partisans and the other half were friendly to me. The hospital was

divided into two hostile camps as it were, intrigue was rampant and tale-bearing unchecked.

If Mrs. Savariyan were to write her own memoirs, as I am doing mine, I do not know how she would account for so much bitterness, between herself and me. But since her own view is not available, perhaps, unconsciously, I am failing to do her full justice. However that may be, my own personal observations and evidence bear witness to the following irregularities :

Mrs. Savariyan was most unscrupulous in exploiting her clients. Though now and then she would give a handsome donation to some philanthropic work, in order perhaps that her charity might have an advertisement in print, she really had no mercy or pity for the poor. Towards well-paying patients however, she was extremely courteous and even obsequious. The poor never had a kind or patient word from her or gentle treatment. Her visits to the special wards were quite frequent and she thought nothing of sitting and chatting with a rich patient, while a poor one in the general wards might be bleeding to death, and she would do no more than to send a nurse, unless the incident happened to coincide with her own rounds, or the patient, though not rich enough to take a special ward, was nevertheless not too poor to give a handsome reward. When attending to the out-patients and writing prescriptions, she never cared to acknowledge the greetings of a great many people, and if any of my own friends were waiting there, she would insultingly ignore them.

Before I actually saw the different kinds of abuses that obtain even in the best of hospitals, I used to pity the illiterate for neglecting their sick, trying all kinds of quack medicines and superstitious remedies rather than take them to the nearest hospital. Our advice to our ignorant neighbours has often fallen on deaf ears, nor would I believe the tales of atrocity, the few who tried the hospital from the outset, had told me. But though hundreds of them have baseless fears or refrain from going to the hospitals just because nobody in the family had anything to do with a hospital before, and hence there was no precedent for themselves, I now saw here things that partly justified the terror of the illiterate. Even decent and educated people, unless they were prominent in something, found themselves ordered about like beggars by the very underlings of the hospital. In a hospital every one is at the mercy of every nurse and upstart. The poor, however, were subjected to an even worse treatment. The doctor of course was supremely unconscious of the irregularities and outrages happening behind her back. There were creatures in the general ward who were so poor as to depend mainly on the hospital diet for nourishment, in spite of their caste prejudices, just because they came from other places or their cottages were too ill-furnished with provisions for them to get proper food from home. These wretches wistfully gaze at the fruits and cakes, and the nice food their more fortunate sisters in the general wards will be getting from their own houses. The hospital food is supplied like

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rations, excellent in its own way, but disliked by some and not fully satisfying the appetites of good eaters. Often unknown to the authorities these poor creatures have to share their own rations with the poor relative or friend who might be attending on them. Under these circumstances the conduct of the sweepers was simply criminal. Because they could get nothing else out of a poor patient, these women asked for the coffee and bread, and cursed and swore so badly that the sick women parted with a considerable share of their own food and faced semi-starvation, even when they needed a good feeding for a forthcoming major operation.

As for the nurses, always with many honourable exceptions, they behaved as if they had all the authority in the hospital in their own hands. They openly hinted for clothes, money, fruits and cakes, and even seized the flowers that some refined patient had in a vase on the top of her locker. The meanest went to the extent of searching the dresses of the poor patients for chance pieces of money that might be hidden on their persons. Their rudeness was intolerable. For all their greed and clamour, except the attention they gave to the patients under the doctor's instructions, they grudged a little extra help. They noisily pushed the screens about, spoke to each other or scolded a patient in shrill and piercing voices, and did everything to shatter the nerves of the weak. I have often observed some unfortunate wretch give a violent start at the sound of a sudden yell and remain quivering all over for some time. At the time of giving a sponge or changing a

bandage, some of the nurses acted in a most inhuman way. Then, if a patient was unable to rise, or was strictly forbidden by the doctor to exert herself, neither the nurse nor the sweeper would do anything to make her comfortable. She may beg for a bed-pan or plead for assistance to walk to the lavatory; she was cursed for being so helpless and for disturbing the individual in question. At nights, sometimes the one on night duty simply stretched herself on a bench or an empty bed and would go to sleep soundly. There are many nurses, who are angels of mercy, gentle and untiring in serving the sick, who never spare themselves, if they could give some relief to a sufferer, but there are monsters too in the form of women, in most of the hospitals that I have seen.

Special ward patients and the well-to-do ones of the general wards, received some courtesy. Gifts of fruit and cake were accepted and more costly ones expected. Dr. Savarian's method of choosing her own present usually took the form of admiring a fine saree: the patient or one of her relatives wore, enquiring the price and requesting the patient to get one for her since she could not find anything like that in the the local shops. If there was an anxiety to please the doctor the dress was ordered at any cost. At the time of discharge, the doctor received fine presents, and everybody else too according to their rank, from the nurses down to the sweepers. It was astonishing, how many people expected presents, and how difficult it was to satisfy them.

There was once a confinement case. It was a petty schoolmaster's wife who became a mother after years of barrenness. As the date approached for her discharge, Dr. Savariyan described the kind of sarees she would appreciate though never either promised one or invited to choose it.

Even in private practice, Mrs. Savariyan followed the same unprincipled methods. The patient's life was, however, of secondary importance. It was the fee that was the main consideration. There was a government officer whose daughter had come to her maiden home for her confinement. The young lady had a step-mother, who was not over-anxious to secure costly medical aid. Midwife Rhoda, a friend of the family, had consented to accept the case for fifteen rupees. Dr. Savariyan wanted the case for herself as the father was a rich man. She threatened to have the midwife dismissed if she took up the case and sent word to the officer that Rhoda had no orders to attend on the patient and that if he desired she was prepared to take up the case. The girl's condition was critical and her father had no alternative but to send for Mrs. Savariyan. She went to the bungalow, but refused to step into the lying-in-chamber unless she had her fee paid immediately, fifty rupees, cash down.

"Is the teacher's profession or the doctor's, the nobler?" is a most popular and much hackneyed topic for school debates. When I was a school girl, I voted for the doctor, and when it came to my choosing a technical education, I chose the doctor's. But now I see, that whereas

in the hands of those with a high sense of duty towards suffering humanity, it was the noblest of services, in the hands of grabbing self-seekers, it was the most devilish business imaginable. And what a number in the profession are greedy, selfish and inhuman! My own aunt Krupa was a medical woman too, but I was never long with her to have observed what kind of a person she was, though I used to see that when vegetable sellers came for medicine, she used to make them pay with chillies and onions, if they had nothing else. I also knew she had plenty of private practice and was making piles of money, since the district where she worked was full of landed proprietors. In the hospitals people become rich in no time. Why, the pupil nurses are usually recruited from the lowest ranks of society, and when these girls come from their homes, they are hardly able to bring the few and cheap garments prescribed by the regulations as necessary for their equipment and they look so down and out with scarcely a glass bangle for an ornament, that one can never imagine how they will turn out before they have put in the probation period. These same humble creatures change into fashionable ladies in a few weeks and have credit at all the important millinery shops and are on the way to possessing gold chains and bangles and brooches.

I was by no means one of the selfless band of workers, but I really shuddered to be heartless. Though poor and illiterate women and their rabble relatives can be most irritating in their

fuss and everything, I did not feel that their claims for my attention were less important than those of the rich. It was given to me to feel the grace that is available to all human beings if we care to be influenced by it. My own worldliness was brought to too low an ebb for me to care to enter the race for money making for its own sake. I could feel for distress, no matter whether the object was rich or poor. In my every trouble I had learnt to look to God for comfort and peace of mind, and He helped me to sympathise with others who were in trouble. I felt scandalized to see the taking of bribes by flattery or intimidation and was foolish enough to express my disapproval.

I might have done better than to have confided this to the feminine Judas, Miranda Ephraim, having known her character in the making at Sigripore, but I was taken in by her friendly advances and hanging about me, as sincere. She expressed her indignation—all hypocrisy—at Dr. Savariyan's ruthlessness, her intrigues and her meanness and told tales against some of the nurses, so that I never suspected she was setting a trap for me. I fell into it and immediately, the factions began, the tale-bearing, the indirect taunts and all the other troubles which made life a burden to me there. The very servants were instigated to disobey me. My presence at the mess was utterly ignored, and my character, as perhaps described by Miranda, sneeringly discussed. Mrs. Savariyan went and reported to the doctor, that I was setting the whole hospital against her,

and also prejudicing the public against her in order to steal her private practice. If Dr. Zephaniah had only made a thorough investigation, she might have had a first-hand knowledge of the true state of affairs, but strange to say such an elderly and experienced woman acted on hearsay reports and judged me. When she put me on trial, I was convinced that silence would be far better under those circumstances than to offer an explanation and in this instance silence was construed as admitting the charges against me. Yet, Doctor was rather easy-going and let me off after a severe warning, and what we call a good 'wiggling'.

If I was unpopular with some of the hospital staff and establishment, I became a favourite with the patients. Finding that I did not persecute them or treat them like animals, they brightened up at the sight of me. Mrs. Savariyan and I were expected to deal with the out-patients from seven o'clock in the morning. Doctor arrived at 8-30 a.m. Though habitually a late riser, I was at my post by 7 a.m. Mrs. Savariyan grandly strolled in at 8-20 a.m. just in time for Doctor to find her there. The human craving for vengeance would urge me to do the same, but when I thought of the sick and helpless, I had no heart to neglect the guiltless, when they needed my help badly. They were attached to me and this knowledge helped to fan the flame of Mrs. Savariyan's hatred for me. Everybody invited me to attend cases in their houses, and she really lost a number of would-be clients among

the ordinary middle class. All the same, she could never make up her mind to be more humane.

Mrs. Savariyan's grabbing nature was only equalled by her meanness. She was always spying to see who came for me. Our rooms were in the same block and we had the same gate in common. Even my private friends who had nothing at all to do with me professionally, gave her heart burns. She took every one for a wealthy client, watched them or set a partisan to act eavesdropper behind a curtain. Whenever I was not at my quarters, she intercepted the notes my friends had written to me and misappropriated the hampers or trays of fruit or vegetables which my clients had sent for me, and unless some one casually referred to it, I had no means of knowing about it either. She had her own admirers, whom she encouraged, but mercilessly maligned my own character when male visitors came for me, my callers being mostly married men who dropped in to consult me about their wives and children, because they used to treat me as a member of their respective families.

At Timmarayahali, I had some experience of an entirely different nature, if equally unpleasant. I deemed it better to avoid the common mess and set up my own cooking. One of my friends engaged a servant-maid for me, a Christian woman, an 'Untouchable' convert. I only knew her as Mariama, but everybody else called her by her pre-baptismal name, Nagama. She had an invalid husband and a married step-son in her cottage.

and Mariama herself had three little kids of her own, all girls. She also used to speak of a married step-daughter in one of the villages. She took her three youngsters wherever she went, so that keeping their mother company in my kitchen, they sampled all my dishes before they came to the table. Naturally there was a great waste of provisions. She purposely cooked large quantities of food in order to feed her children, or to carry home the large quantities that were left over. So my attempt to escape trouble in one way brought me to face it in a different manner. At this time I was at Mariama's mercy. Because she made me independent of the hospital mess, however, I kept her on.

When I was off duty, I used to go into the town to see my friends, but often I preferred to stay in my quarters and play chess or cards with my allies among the nurses. Hannah Briggs was my fag, while her sister Clara, though quite nice to me, was Mrs. Savariyan's favourite. But the nurses used to leave the game and go off when it was getting most exciting, because they had work to do, and I had to put away the materials reluctantly. I thought there would be no such disappointment if I got Mariama to play with me. I taught her some of the games, but this led to a hurried cooking or neglect of the kitchen on her part as I refused to let her go till a game was finished.

This play intimacy between my servant and me brought to light some startling revelations. In my grandfather's family, my aunts and uncles would

never entertain the idea of allowing a Pariah or 'Chuckler to enter the house as a cook, and it would have given them forty fits, had they known that I had employed one. After all, they had come from the same ranks, if conversion and culture and cash had given them a triple polish. It is a strange paradox too that while the real caste people, the Brahmins at their head, are on the war path to abolish all false ideas of superiority, it is the Christians who are now making much ado about it, the most anxious being those who never had a pedigree. One day, when Maria came to know that our family property lay at Sunderkote, she innocently asked me:

"Then, Ma, do you happen to know Murry Jacob, a very wealthy man?"

Who but my grandfather was Murry Jacob? I was taken aback by her question, but trying to find out what she had got to say about him, I answered: "Of course. How do you know him?"

"How? He is my father's own brother," was the astonishing reply. "Murry was my own maiden name too, though it is changed after my marriage. My husband is my own cousin, my father's sister's son, and so he is nephew to Mr. Jacob also."

It was a startling, staggering revelation. I had to clear my throat several times before I asked again: "Do you really mean to say that Mr. Jacob was uncle, to you and to your husband?"

"Do you think he will deny the relationship, no matter how grand a Maharaj he might be

now? You see, Amma, he was the only one in the family to become a Christian, while his brothers and sisters remained in their own caste. His wife and he had both the knack of making a little go a long way and they got much out of the missionaries too. Even after they became educated and refined, they did all the hard labour with their own hands. It is now that the sons and daughters are dorais and doraisanies (fine ladies and gentlemen). Then, they were just like us. Did you notice how rough and chappy and knotty my aunt's hands are?

"After a time they started giving out that they were Brahmin converts. Who would believe it in their own place? But, of course, after the older generations pass away, the younger ones won't know all this, and will believe anything. They don't own us because we are poor. But where will the blood go, Ma?"

"Very true," I affirmed with a sinking heart. What a nerve shattering revelation, and what a blow to pride and pretension like ours! Aunt Keziah should have heard this story—aunt Keziah, with her affectation of the Shastraic Brahmin style, the typical Brahmin utterance, her pretended abhorrence of the animal diet, though she never ate a single meal without it, she should have listened to Maria's story. Others too affected to have been Brahmin converts, my father when he ceased idolizing Western clothes had transferred his faith to the worship of Brahminism. He went a step beyond his sister, and exchanged a mixed diet for a purely vegetarian one, though

he had never cared to touch his food, unless there was some preparation from flesh or fish.

Where was my one time arrogant pride now, after Maria's tale? I was a Murry girl too, and this woman, my hired servant, with her six fingers on either hand was my aunt by blood, and her cripple husband my uncle by blood, and the dirty brats who sampled my dishes in the kitchen, my cousins!

As if in her unconscious chatter she was bent on humiliating me to the dust, she started off again and stunned me with her next question: "Amma, have you seen Mr. Jacob's daughter-in-law?"

I was discreet enough not to give out that I knew a great deal of the Jacobs, and I desisted from uttering what was on my lips that both my grand-parents were no more. I was too overwhelmed to go on with the conversation, so simply said: "I cannot answer all your questions. You had better go on with what you have got to say."

"Now, all his sons are married, but when I was a small girl, only the eldest was married. Mr. Jacob's daughter-in-law was a real lady and such a fine one too. She was a high caste girl; though not a Brahmin as they gave her out to be. You see, they wanted to improve their own status by making good marriage connections. I hear that one of the daughters-in-law is really a Brahmin girl, though I haven't seen her or the others. But my uncle and aunt were very proud of their eldest son's wife, yet they did not treat

her according to her delicate upbringing. She was made to do every kind of rough work with the others, like collecting cow-dung from the sheds and patting the dung-cakes for fuel. She was a spirited girl and used to rebel against the administration. She was not even allowed to speak freely with friends. I used to go there every day to cut the grass and to do odd jobs. Poor Dhanama used to pour all her grievances into my young ears. But between ourselves, (lowering her voice into a whisper) do you know Amma, that for all her high caste and refined breeding, she was no samsari? (chaste woman), After she left Sunderkote with her husband, she carried on with a Brahmin zamindar or dewan, I believe; all this under her husband's own roof and after she had become the mother of some children. But I do not know what happened to them all subsequently, as I married a military man and went away far from home."

I was sick at heart. If she had only known that she was saying all this about my own mother! I was only glad she could continue her story no further. Hence in order to find out cautiously whether she had heard about my mother's elopement, I asked:

"Did you never return to your maiden home after your marriage?"

"Twice I did, but at long intervals. Not only was I unable to go home but even my mother could not come to me and be with me at least for my first confinement. I was so far from home. After her passing away, my father did

not marry again, and as he himself had no home I never saw Sunderkote again."

"So your husband is a military man, is he?"

"He was, and he served in the Great War too. He gets a pension now, but that is not enough to feed us all, and he is a permanent invalid and cannot take up any other job."

"You have a married son and daughter, I heard?"

"Not mine exactly. They are the first wife's children. He ought to have married me in the beginning only, according to our relationship, but I was too young for him. (In India, marriage between the children of two brothers or of two sisters is considered as most unlawful and most unclean, whereas the children of a brother and of a sister are bound to marry.) After he lost his first wife, however, he remained a widower for a long time, but the elders of our place arranged this marriage, as I was big enough to marry by that time. My step-son is only two years my junior. He is working here, and so we came to stay with him, after his father's retirement and illness."

You can understand that after this incident, I was more lenient and respectful in my dealings with my cook.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE TROOPS

THEY were the days of non-co-operation, of the Rowlatt Act and Jhallianwallah Bhag, the last mentioned, instead of frightening those who were carrying active propaganda against the Government, fanned the whole country into flame, thus proving a more powerful force towards unifying the country than anything else, and throwing into the ranks of the agitators and revolutionists those who had been timid. Troops were sent on a demonstration tour, from one Hot Bed of politics to another, and were greeted with hoots and hisses and catcalls. When they came to Timmarayahali, we joined the crowds of spectators making their way towards the old parade-ground. The troops had to march along the main road through the market-place, where almost every shop and private building was flying the National flag. As each one was hauled down by the Police another went up immediately. The troops at last managed to clear the market-place marching under their own colours.

We found crowds gathered at the parade-ground, some chaps finding an accommodation even on the trees. As we, the hospital folks, were a

decent party, we were allowed to proceed to the front, where the Anglo-Indians of the place were assembling. A group of hospital people will carry culture and refinement on their very faces. As the spot was not so congested as everywhere else round the parade-ground, we squeezed in somewhere. I managed to catch the wire-fencing in front of me and tried to hold on to it for fear of being swept off my feet by fresh arrivals. By and by, a fat middle-aged Anglo-Indian woman came and endeavoured to order me out, to make room for her as if the place was a monopoly of her community. I was not to be ousted in such a peremptory manner. She then started trying her weight on me and began to push me with her hip. The woman on the other side was driving her elbow into my ribs. That this was not mere accident on account of the crush was seen evident from the remarks I heard all round.

"Push that nigger back."

"Why, what a lot of natives have come over to our side! The Police ought to have kicked them back."

"Oh Charlie, look at those native fellers on the trees!"

"Monkeys, monkeys," from Charlie boy.

A bull-faced man to his neighbours: "Serves the buggers right. They think we can't shoot them down, if they shout Gandhi's name."

"Why do they come and see our troops when they don't want the Government?" from another.

The Government was in no way responsible for all the dirty talk, nor in the least benefitted by irresponsible outbursts of this sort, nor yet have been aware of such. It not only showed how completely the Anglo-Indians identified themselves with Europeans who, however, had no social dealings with them, but also how they felt that this demonstration was entirely for their benefit and to enhance their own prestige. They had no thought that by every word and gesture with which they alienated Indians, they were bringing into greater discredit the Government, which had always given them preferential treatment.

The Anglo-Indians carried their superior and supercilious airs even into the place where they worshipped God. We usually attended evening service in their chapel, because it was conveniently close to the hospital. Even if the late-comers found the other seats crowded and ours roomy, for we never were more than three at a time from the hospital, they would prefer to squeeze in somewhere on the packed benches, rather than find a place on our bench. Once seeing me emerge from the chapel one evening after service, with my own Prayer Book in my hand, I was confronted by one of the members of the congregation, a woman, a self-constituted investigator, who approached me and remarked in a tone of being shocked at my conduct: "Miss, church property should not be taken away," as if an educated woman, a doctor, would do such a thing!

The behaviour of these people was seen at its sorriest at Holy Communion. Unless we waited until the turn of all the Anglo-Indians was over, even those who sat on the benches behind us, would overtake us with indecent haste and go to the altar rails before us. After some experiences of this kind, we prudently kept back till they all had finished.

I am glad that after the gradual loss of their special privileges they are rapidly changing in their attitude towards Indians and especially the educated and enlightened ones, but the amount of the loss of prestige the British Government has suffered on account of the arrogance and bullying of their once favoured children, I suppose, is not generally known. Apart from having Indian blood in their veins, and that too not of the proud and aristocratic castes, which should have kept them from affecting so much exclusiveness, they were not even as well educated as Indians as a community. In this chapel, it was usually the custom for some one other than the speaker of the evening to read the Scripture portions. European officers seldom attended any church or service, but Anglo-Indian officers helped the community in this way. Among these people even regular church-goers did not know the Bible well, as the reading of services from the Prayer Book is such a mechanical thing. On one occasion there was a humorous incident. Mr. Vaughan, some one connected with the workshop, announced the Gospel of St. Luke, Chapter I, from the first verse, and he read as follows:

" And He said also unto His disciple : There was a certain man which had a steward, and the same was accused unto Him that he had wasted his goods and he called him and said unto him : How is it that I hear, " And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that as they went, they were cleansed———."

It was quite clear that instead of one page Mr. Vaughan had turned over two and went on reading without understanding what he was about or discovering his own mistake, till he came to the next stop. In spite of all our efforts to preserve our gravity we found ourselves glancing at each other with a smile.

CHAPTER XXXIX

SOME DOMESTIC EVENTS

HARRY had always been a ne'er-do-well. He had started cat-burglary on a modest scale. Caught red-handed on one occasion, he had a narrow escape from conviction by uncle Purushotham's clever manipulations. It was a great relief when he was recruited for a clerk's post in military service and sent to Mesopotamia. His escapades there are unknown, but once he had applied to father for an urgent remittance of five hundred rupees and when the latter demanded an explanation first, had retaliated by keeping an inexorable silence. His return to India after his father's death, his vile conduct in Bhavanipur, and his posting to Quetta have already been related elsewhere. Now Harry was going to be married.

My mother and Hema were unable to get on together. It was the old story of the Indian mother-in-law and daughter-in-law over again. In ancient times, or in old-fashioned or illiterate families, a present-day daughter-in-law might be meek and submissive, but Hema was of a different mould. My mother, however, had nowhere else to go, having only a few step-brothers with whom she was not in touch, and my father's

relatives, if heartily detested and despised by her, were in no mood to welcome her, after the disgrace she had brought on the family. Hema took frequent trips to her own maiden home and often her mother with the younger children used to be Davy's guests. At such times, though her son was the master of the house, my mother was subjected to the double tyranny of mother and daughter, and she was a person with a terrible temper, so that compromise was impossible. Hema and her mother could go away if they could not stand the tension, but where was my mother to go? I was residing in the hospital, Willie was in his grandfather's place, and Harry was the only one left, apart from Emmie, who was an exile, and Mary, not an independent woman.

Harry was plainly hinting at wanting to be married. He was drinking and gambling away the piece of wet-land he had received as a reward for his war-time service, and mother thinking that a wife and family would constitute a sobering influence on his character, was on the look-out for a suitable bride. From bitter experience with Hema, she determined to have an orphan girl from some boarding school for her second daughter-in-law, who might be entirely under her own control. Mary, who knew such an orphan girl in the boarding school at Purnamati, recommended Agnes, and at once the negotiations began. This incident led to renewed mud-slinging between my mother and my father's relatives. My aunts were on fire, when they heard that

without consulting them on the subject, my mother was getting a Panchama girl for their nephew. The bitter and devastating accusations they heaped on my mother, who was not only less bigotted than they about caste but also had very little love for their family, caused her to release the concentrated venom in her heart in fierce retaliation. She asked my aunt, if Panchamas were inferior to Chucklers, bent upon ridiculing the caste pretensions of her husband's family, and whether Panchamas might not be expected to make as good upstarts as Chucklers. Venom could be shot from the other side also, and they replied by publishing anew my mother's unedifying history. We told lies, we pretended and did everything in order to look respectable before others, but when passions were roused, we freely exposed and published and broadcast far and wide all the family secrets and sores and sins, the one and only object at such times being to crush and humble each other and try to vindicate our own actions. We took into confidence every vulgar gossip and voluntary unpaid advertiser of scandals. Any suggestion that one side at least might refrain from these dirty methods, to keep outsiders from coming to know purely private matters, brought down an avalanche from both parties on the arbitrator's head.

"Am I to be mum, and listen meekly to all that abuse? Tell the other to shut up first." Each one wanted the other to set the example and so there was no help for it. There was no honour for God and there was no self-respect ;

there was only a mad purpose to take revenge, no matter how many innocent people were involved and how many laughed at our exposing each other. I used to think, that if two individuals could not subdue their own anger, and seek peaceful methods of settlement, even if one side had to make a little sacrifice, whether it was a wonder that nations, made up of millions of such unyielding individuals, could be prevailed upon to overlook things, make a slight sacrifice and refrain from the horrors of a war, in which, even the victorious country has paid too great a price to benefit by its victory. People will conquer the oceans, the Poles, the deserts, the mountains, and harness the forces of Nature to serve humanity, but they will not conquer their greed, their lust, their hatred or harness their passions for the welfare of the world.

In the family civil war, my mother prevailed. Agnes was withdrawn from school and became Mary's guest and we all went to Purnamati for the wedding. Except uncle Luke, none from my grandfather's house graced the wedding. Mary's house being a small one, she had arranged accommodation for the bridegroom's party in a separate building rented for the purpose. There were so many Anglo-Indians and Madrasis in the vicinity, that I almost felt I was back again in the Black Town of my childhood. Purnamati was not only an important commercial place, with many European firms, but a battalion of some militia was also stationed there. They were all

in receipt of allowances not only according to their rank, but as well according as they were single or married, and even the children were taken into account. Our Indian friends used to denounce the discriminative policy of Government, in recruiting only Anglo-Indians to this force where the fellows did nothing, but were paid for themselves, their wives and their children, while folks sweating hard the whole day long, had a job to make both ends meet. These volunteers were not so very well off as a great many might have been. I suppose drink, extravagance and things like that, kept many in low circumstances. Here also there was the reckless feasting and merry-making at pay time, and going in for credit, running up bills and struggling for the rest of the month. Many lived in tumble-down mud cottages, which could only be recognised as being tenanted by Anglo-Indians and not by the labouring classes of Indians, by an atmosphere foreign to the working population of India. Old and discoloured door and window curtains, the utensils lying about the cottage, a jug, a basin, or some such article, English garments hanging out to dry on the lines, strains of English music, vocal or from instruments like the violin, accordion, mouth-organ, or flute,—all these were unmistakable symbols of Anglo-Indian occupation among the dwellings of Indian workers.

There was a small maidan or open space, used as a short cut by the people of this colony between the roads to the front and behind.

The place was as dirty as it could be with muck heaps, rubbish and all imaginable garbage, the only attraction being some tamarind and jamoon trees which were visited by tree-pies and parrots. A corner of this maidan, however, was clean and level and consisted of a badminton court with two poles across which they hung the net at play time. My brother-in-law, Mr. Meshach, though fond of tennis, was yet keen on badminton, for lack of conveniences for his favourite game. He was a black wiry man who had seen some war service, and had passed for an Anglo-Indian in the ranks, though here he never wore anything but Indian clothes. For all that, he kept up the pretence of his being an Anglo-Indian and of his wife, my sister Mary, being one too, and drew a regular unearned income both on his own behalf and hers, the distant authorities being satisfied by 'Meshach' and 'Mary' as indicating Anglo-Indian names.

At this time, Mr. Meshach was employed at the salt works and had a regular monthly salary from this as well. He was a very good badminton player, but being a fiery tempered man could not stand the superior airs of the Anglo-Indians with whom he and a few other Indians played. When we were at Purnamati one evening, a hitch occurred between the Indian and the Anglo-Indian teams. My brother-in-law was the leader on his side and when the other side used abusive language, he returned it with interest. Enraged at this slight, one of the Anglo-Indian players struck Mr. Meshach

and he returned the compliment, and very soon the two men were raining blows on each other. The other Anglo-Indians instead of separating them or making peace between the two, joined the attack on Mr. Meshach. While the Hindus who were playing on my brother-in-law's side were running to fetch help as there were no sympathisers in this Anglo-Indian quarter, and the women and children in our house were shrieking, the Anglo-Indian women came out with supplies of whips and sticks for their men. By the time my brother-in-law had received some lashes from whip chord, his friends arrived with some Muslim young men who had provided themselves with clubs to meet the Anglos. Seeing that the odds would now turn against them, one of the Anglo-Indians rushed to the Police Station and fetched a sub-inspector and a constable reporting a "serious rioting" by the natives of Commercialpet. In the days of the Rowlatt Act, anything reported against a native was believed.

When the necessary investigation was made, the Police officer came to understand that the party making the complaint had not only been the aggressive one, but was also in actual possession of the field. By cautious mediation he managed to ease the tension, and though nothing serious turned up, my brother-in-law kept sneering at the courage of heroes who could take the law into their own hands, and attack a single man, but who had to run and take refuge in the law of the land, when they had to face determination on the other side, by concocting a

deliberate lie about rioting, taking advantage of the political situation. I tell you, that woman as I was, I had a great mind to shoot down every coward of them, for treating Indians like that in their own home-land. But now I know, that vengeance is not the healing touch that the world so sadly needs today.

Then arrived the bridegroom from Jubbulpore, where he was serving at that time. I always used to wonder, how Harry would like his bride, for Agnes was a very plain looking girl. Not that Harry was handsome. On the contrary, Agnes was the better looking of the two. But Harry had been exceedingly fastidious in his tastes and had vowed to marry none but an Anglo-Indian or Konkani girl. The Konkani Indians of the West Coast are very fair and handsome. But Agnes was his destined wife and I believe that none but an absolute orphan and an unattractive girl would have consented to marry this man, since no parent was likely to sacrifice his daughter to a drunkard, and no good looking maiden would be so hopeless of making a better match. Having first been the victim of a ruthless step-mother, and later on a destitute, her patience and long suffering nature were of the most tenacious order. She was exceedingly submissive and meek and strove anxiously to please and serve others. Though she had not much of an education, she was a famous lace worker and could eke out a living if it came to that.

When Harry was taken to his sister's house to see the bride, I was one of those who

stayed behind and so am unable to say, what his first impressions of his prospective bride were. All that I, know is, that it was not in the best of spirits that Harry returned. My mother was most anxious to see that he did not get drunk before the marriage was over, and the close watch kept over him, and the lectures that he had to hear from his brothers, seem to have irritated him to breaking point.

Both houses were decorated with paper work and green leaves wearing the aspect of high festivity, and everybody, especially the children, were in great excitement. Invitations had been issued and the wedding reception was carefully arranged. There is always a hurry and bustle on the occasion of a marriage, and this was no exception. A beautiful shower bouquet had been sent for the bride by some of her missionary friends. The watch on the bridegroom naturally relaxing a little in the general excitement, he was dead drunk on the wedding day. When it was time to dress the bride, and everybody to get ready to go to church, Harry was found floundering on his bed and refusing to get up, and dress. All were in dismay. Each one took a turn to coax him and explain what a disgrace it would be if the marriage did not take place, when the priest was waiting, the bride ready and all the guests present. Every attempt to move him only hardened him the more. Drunk to the utmost of his capacity and smelling strongly of liquor, his eyes bloodshot, he gave one thundering roar, and bade every man, woman and child of

as who chose to be dressed so grandly, to go and get ourselves married, and not to worry him. Davy who always had a kind of influence on him, took him by the hand, made him rise, and led him as far as the sitting-room, sullen and ready for a second outburst. In his intoxication, Harry reeled and stumbled all the way. Tom, Mr. Meshach's dog, which was lying curled up at the threshold while his master was using his eloquence on Harry, was suddenly seized by the drunken wretch who began dashing the dog's head on the floor much in the same way that the dhoby beats a shirt on the stone, till someone overpowered the savage young man and rescued the yelling animal.

The wedding had to be put off. We were dealing with a raving mad fellow. The event was arranged for the following day. Mr. Meshach was not a teetotaller, but he took his peg in moderation and had some sympathy for Harry. He spent long hours with Harry after he was sober, soothing his temper and probably promising a good bout with himself after the wedding should be over on the morrow. The raging man subsided. When Harry was brought back by his brother-in-law, he went straight to bed without taking his dinner. The next morning he asked me :

"Did I behave very violently last evening, Meena?"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Are you a man who will fight your enemies and not the devil in you?" I answered.

"No, Meena, I did not mean to take a drink, I swear. When I went out for a walk, I met a friend and that wretch offered me a glass. I could not refuse it and I did not take much either. Fact. I promise to give it up, believe me."

Perhaps he waited for my approval, which was not forthcoming. Then he asked: "Does Agnes know I was drunk?"

"What else do you think she takes to be the reason for the prevention of a marriage? Do you imagine that every one was drunk like you, to forget your conduct yesterday?"

He was silent and crest-fallen, sorry in his sober moments for what he had done under the influence of drink. At the right time without any difficulty, he dressed up and the wedding took place, but we of course were all crest-fallen having no face to meet the priest or the wedding guests. After the wedding reception and the departure of the guests, Harry was seen to be hilarious and as night advanced his hilarity increased. His brother-in-law had managed to see the wedding through and kept his word with Harry, paying him the blackmail of a drink. The banquet took place at nine o'clock. Already Harry's conversation was rambling, vociferous and swaggering. He talked of his military exploits, his musical talent and everything else, sickening to hear. Then he called for a flute to give us a practical demonstration of his skill, and when one was not forthcoming he despised the harmonium which was offered in its stead, as an out of date and screaming monster, but he chose to give us the

benefit of his vocal singing which under the influence of drink was like a song in delirium. To keep him from giving further proof of his musical talent, my brother-in-law whispered something in his ear, which acted like magic. I know it must have been the promise of another peg, since Mr. Meshach himself was in the mood to make merry.

Panic seized us all when the twain went out. Already there were whisperings which did not add to our comfort. On all hands we were questioned why the numerous uncles and aunts were not present for the wedding. It would, indeed, have redounded to our credit to have explained that this absence was an eloquent protest against our choosing a nameless girl to enter the family, when to everybody present it was clearly apparent that we had on the other hand been criminally guilty of beguiling an innocent girl to take an irretrievable step into hell for all life. Agnes looking frightened sat silent on a mat with drooping head and unraised eyes as became a young bride.

By and by we could hear the two men returning, but the footsteps were taking a turn towards the back of the house instead of coming straight. The back gate of Mary's house opened on an empty site, on which they had recently put up a merry-go-round for some village carnival. Long before midnight, the merry makers had gone home and in the moonlight one could see the deserted plaything, with its ring of zoological creatures hanging still and solemn from

the roof. The night was still as still could be. The guests had long departed and the children had gone, to sleep in every nook and corner without proper beds. The poor bride sat patiently without a word to anybody. The grown-ups were all sleepless, watching what Harry might do next. When the voices and footsteps were proceeding towards the merry-go-round, we all felt curious, and stealing to the back of the house, opened the gate slightly and watched. We witnessed the strangest midnight drama I have ever seen.

The two men like two mischievous and playful boys, at first went round and round the ring examining the wooden mounts. "See brother-in-law," cried Harry, "this one is a tiger."

We of course could not recognise these objects from such a distance.

"By——" swore Mr. Meshach, "it is a camel and not a tiger. I declare it and challenge you to contradict me."

"Humph man," sneered Harry, "have you ever seen a camel in all your life? I have ridden camels for years in Iraq and can as easily recognise one as you can a donkey. This is a tiger. I maintain it. Will you fight?"

Davy and Willie were preparing to interfere in case, a duel between the bridegroom and the bride's guardian should mark the culmination of the day's festivities. But my brother-in-law had the good sense to suggest—

"Oh come, Harry; we can fight it out to-morrow. But first of all, let us have a jolly good spin on the merry-go-round."

The drunkards imagined that with the manager of the apparatus in his bed and no one to turn it, the merry-go-round would revolve. Each gave a resounding clap to the shoulder of the other, by way of a caress I believe, and then Mr. Meshach mounted one of the creatures and shouted: "Ahoy, Mr. Crocodile, ahoy, you lazy beast, go ahead, can't you?"

Harry urged his lion with a similar encouragement, but the merry-go-round made no response.

"I say, brother-in-law," broke Harry, "how would you like the idea of my giving a spin to Agnes?"

"That would be fine, but give her the spin to-morrow. She must be very tired now. Come, it's time we were in bed."

Shaking with silent laughter as we the spectators were, we scampered indoors and behaved as if we had witnessed nothing extraordinary. The two men dismounted their beasts and came into the house. We hoped that the comedy or tragedy, or whatever the thing had been, had ended there. But the moment he entered, Harry went looking for his wife. The poor girl had not even spoken to him before, and was thoroughly frightened out of her senses when he proposed that she should go out with him and have a ride on the merry-go-round. My mother and Mary protested with all their might, but he answered them rudely,

saying that it was the wife's duty to obey her husband.

"Come out at once, or I'll give you a divorce tomorrow and marry some one else," he roared.

The trembling girl rose and followed him to the back gate. Davy and Willie scandalized by this conduct, ordered Harry to leave the girl alone. He was talking loosely about divorce and separation and the two brothers were afraid he might do anything in his madness, if he once took it into his head. Fearing that his brothers might interfere, as soon as he reached the gate, Harry started dragging Agnes by her hand. The poor bride burst out sobbing and collapsed near the gate, much ashamed to vault on a mount at Harry's repeated orders. The wretch taking this as an affront to his own authority, caught her by the hair and ran her up and down between the house and the merry-go-round, till my brother-in-law rescued his ward and shut her up in Mary's bed-room. Harry battered at the door demanding for his wife, but Mary resolutely refused to open the door or to hand over the victim. The men overpowered the drunken beast, led him to his bed and locked up the room, where he raged like a hurricane, till a drunken slumber overcame him.

Thus began the fulfilment of my mother's hope that marriage would make her dissolute son better and that the sacrifice of an orphan was not too great a price for the trial.

My visit to Purnamati was memorable in other ways; for in the few days that I was

there, my brother-in-law was approached by half a dozen men to recommend them as suitors for my hand and he proudly answered that I had already rejected offers from high government officers and was not likely to consider anything from men of their rank and position. I was still made a show-piece. Mary once urged me to go with her and see her school. She was the head-mistress of a municipal elementary girls' school. When I went there to please her, what was my embarrassment to find everybody making a servile obeisance, with a look of utter dejection and despair on their features! The girls scampered into their classes like a pack of scared rabbits and stared at me with curiosity.

"No, not the Inspectress; she is my sister, a lady doctor just come to see the school," Mary explained. The effect was instantaneous. I understood why my visit had caused such a panic.

The officiousness was, however, still there, but the faces were all wreathed in smiles and the teachers seemed to be anxious to surpass each other in their efforts to please me.

"Your sister? Your own sister?" asked some in a tone of astonishment as if the statements were unbelievable.

One corpulent man on the wrong side of forty, who wore the expression of a jolly good fellow on his countenance, begged my sister to allow him to arrange a small function in my honour. He was the music master I believe and anxious to display his cleverness. The school had no Veena and he ran home to fetch his own,

but he was such a long time coming and the school such an uninteresting place, that I began to show my disgust to Mary, hoping she would allow me to go home. But Mary was never more exasperating than on that day. I did not know what pleasure it gave her to detain me in spite of my chagrin and impatience, but she coaxed me and made me wait till the music master returned, detaining the whole school as well, even after the bell was given, because she herself stayed away in the afternoon recess. I heartily wished the music master at the bottom of the Bay of Bengal. But he came back with two small girls dressed in all their gaudy fineries and loaded with jewels. These kids he introduced to me as his daughters and proficient in music too, and I thought that I had gone to the school mainly for the benefit of the music master and his children. Mary hurriedly whispered into my ear not to look at the musician's face during his performance. It had clearly occurred as an after thought to her, but when the reason was not known, I was curious to find out why she gave the caution, and hence I made it a point to observe his features closely.

Squatting on the mat, he asked me :

"Madam, will you suggest something?"

"Anything from Tyagaraya's kritis will please me," I answered.

" 'Raghu nayaka nee pada yuga,' for instance?" he asked.

"Oh yes, please: I like that very much."

A tiresome interval followed which he spent in tuning the instrument. That done, he began to strike the notes with his fingers on the strings and started singing. You would have thought that the man was suddenly seized with some sort of apoplexy. The various nods of the head, the rolling of the eye-balls, the jerking and twitching of every muscle on the face, showed the man as if he had been going through violent fits, or that he had a battery in his head like those rubber figures used for advertisement purposes which do all these comical tricks. I indulged myself in loud expressions of merriment, but he was quite unconscious of everything except the music and, really, he was a master at that.

After 'Raghu nayaka' was over, he looked at me questioningly for the next piece I might suggest, but I felt that nothing could persuade me to stay another minute in Mary's school, when Mary, to whom I would have given a severe shaking if she had been a girl once more, as if bent on shattering my nerves, suggested her own favourite piece, Devi Meenakshi, and I was made to witness more of the delirium tremens. When that too was over, the daughters gave a performance on the harmonium and other girls went through an English dialogue and played kolattam. Mary was positively exasperating. She saw how her long programme tortured me and at last mercifully allowed me to go home, sending a conductress for an escort.

CHAPTER XL

THE JEREMIAHS

I had some particular friends at Timmarayahali. It was Mrs. Jeremiah and her daughters. The late Mr. Jeremiah had been a doctor in Malaya, where all the daughters had been married. But having property in their old home at Timmarayahali, the doctor's widow never failed to spend some months in the year in her Indian home. She was likewise obsessed with a strange fad that her grandchildren should be born in the home-land as far as she could help it, and so brought away whichever daughter was expecting a confinement, all the way across the Bay of Bengal to India. I happened to attend one or two confinements and became a favourite with Mrs. Jeremiah.

Mrs. Jeremiah was a short lady inclined to be plump. She possessed a very good-natured looking face which still retained patches of the once fair skin and some remnants of her youthful beauty, which must have been considerable. She still dressed after the fashion in vogue during her young days, the blouses having high collars and long sleeves, and her sarees worn with gathers behind. When she went out she wore shoes and stockings, but at home used only slippers. Her chief pastime was talking,—talking

and telling stories, the histories of all the people she knew, though the listener had nothing in the world to do with them nor was ever likely to come across them, either in this world or the next, and she gave wonderful descriptions of Malaya, her fingers all the while as busy tatting as her tongue was rattling away the words. The wonder about it all was that the more she talked, the more I liked to hear. She never was a bore and her tales and descriptions never became stale or were lacking in interest. They were all-absorbing and what she told me about Malaya, made me dream by night and by day. When I exhibited a special interest in this topic, she informed me that lady doctors were not plentiful in Malay and that if I cared to go so far, I would have beautiful prospects. Yes, why not go to the land of my dreams, the land of equatorial forests and tigers and azure seas? I had no father now from whom I would be reluctant to part. My sisters and brothers, if they felt my absence at all, would not miss me much. There was only mother, and she would not think of either herself or my settling down across the seas and she had her other children too.

"What are you thinking about Dr. Prakasa Rao? Day dreaming? Young girls always do that, you know." With these words, Mrs. Jeremiah roused me from my reverie. She was smiling as she gazed at me through her spectacles.

"I wish you would invite me to spend a holiday in Malaya, at Singapore or anywhere," I answered with a sigh and a smile.

"Certainly; you are welcome. We are returning there in a few months and you can make the voyage in our company," said the daughter, Mrs. Leonard, from her arm-chair. In her arms was the baby, 'my baby', as they used to call her on account of my attending on the case and standing god-mother at the baptism. Mrs. Leonard was taller than I, and was a well carved ebony figure. She wore fashionable chains and bangles and ear pendants that swung and swayed at the slightest movement. Passing for an Anglo-Indian in Malaya, even in India she was not in Indian costume. She wore a sleeveless, very low necked blouse of broad striped silk, and a very short skirt of large squared silk like what the Burmese men wear for their lower garment. The scanty dress exposed a great deal of her black arms, black bosom and black legs. Even the slippers were so narrow at the toes that the small toe on either foot was permanently outside. But Mrs. Leonard was a 'black beauty' with her large and lustrous eyes, her pearly teeth and chiselled features. She was Mrs. Jeremiah's last born and like all her sisters had married an Anglo-Indian.

"I say, dear," her mother like the very incarnation of a temptress put in, "do make up your mind to come away with us. Lady Doctors are in such demand over there."

"It would be glorious, but I suppose all are Chinese and Malays?" I said.

"Oh no, not at all," answered mother and daughter in one voice. "You will find plenty of Madrasis there, heaps of Tamil people. I am sure

you will be quite at home there. You can bring Mamma too."

"But my mother has other children too," I answered, wistfully, as if I alone had a special claim on her. All the others had their families except Willie, and he would get one. The others did not need her so much as I did. Then I brightened at the reflection that Willie might give up his business as uncle's partner at Sunderkote and set up some trade in Malaya where, as I imagined, he would have glorious prospects. All sorts of wild schemes were springing up in my head and rosy visions flitted before my eyes and from that moment my mind was unsettled. Day or night, I could think of nothing else but emigration to Malaya. I wanted to propose that Willie should resign his partnership and start on the adventure with me. Of course, they were all sure to call me a bedlamite to abandon that which was already in hand to search for a mare's nest in Malaya, without friends or influence or any help over there. Natural scenery was good in its own way, but it could not help one to get a living which was worth sacrificing old ties at home and leaving kindred. However I did not commit the blunder of hastily proposing my schemes. Yet I was longing, dying to see Malaya, and my head was full of plans how to accomplish my purpose.

I looked about me in Mrs. Jeremiah's house and saw long strings of mutton strips hung in festoons from end to end of the court-yard and across, and asked Mrs. Jeremiah whether meat

was scarce in Malaya. She replied that there was plenty of meat, but no sunshine to cure and dry it, since she was fond of dried meat for a change now and then.

"No sunshine near the equator?" I asked in surprise.

"I mean, dear, that it is either raining always throughout the year, or it is cloudy. We can never be sure of sunshine to prepare dried meat.

I no longer fretted, for my cook being my aunt, no longer cared for Mrs. Savariyan's spite, nor for the tales which were carried to the Doctor's ears. Malaya was there calling me, and the temptation was irresistible. I had a feeling that my troubles would soon have an end. Was it a mere coincidence or was it a special arrangement of Providence, that I should have come into contact with the Jeremiahs and dream about going to Malaya? To me it seems the latter, but you can take it as you like. I am here, in Malaya, my dream-land, as I write these memoirs, actually here, but under circumstances which even in my most morbid moments I could not have conjured up.

My mother had gone up with Harry and his bride to Jubbulpore, but a month's residence with her son had convinced her, though she never admitted it, how far a wife and the responsibility of a family would change the character of Harry. He was indeed gay and kind to Agnes in his sober hours which unfortunately were not many that he spent at home, for straight from office he went to the gin-shop before turning

his steps homeward. The first month after the marriage, he had even placed the whole amount of his salary in his wife's hands, but before a week was out, had taken back almost all of it in instalments. If she questioned him or protested, there was the usual row and he did not even hesitate to bang her. During my mother's stay alone, he had seized the only gold jewel he had ever given his wife and the only one she had on her person, mortgaged it and wasted the money on drink, always indignantly replying to her demands that her jewel was not lost, that he would redeem it for her as soon as he could and that she was not to worry him about it. His promises were as good as written on water. When Harry was wanting all the money that he could seize for his drink, and more, when would he find the money to redeem the jewel? Mother had hoped that in Harry's house at least she would be mistress, with Agnes only a puppet in her hands. Now she was more anxious to leave her second son's roof than she ever was to leave Davy's, not because she could not get on with her second daughter-in-law, but for fear of her own jewels disappearing one by one. She now saw that but for the military supplies of provisions they received, Harry and Agnes would soon be starving for most part of the time. She wondered how Harry managed to keep his job without getting the sack.

Cured of her illusions, unwilling to part with her jewels, my mother made up her mind to go to Emmie, that daughter whom she had so often

ill-treated, because she protested against her mother's shameful conduct and later on cruelly beaten for walking in her own footsteps, before the girl chose a voluntary exile. Emmie had kept herself permanently cut off from the family and was making her living as a schoolmistress in the far south, where her antecedents were not known and with her child passing off for an orphan niece. She had not married, and fortunately did not bring forth any more nameless children into the world.

Some months after mother had gone to stay with her, Emmie wrote to me informing that mother was suffering from some bad pain in the thigh and could not leave her bed. I thought it was sciatica and wrote back to my sister, giving her the necessary instructions for the treatment and asking her to call for medical advice if there was no improvement or relief within the expected time. For some weeks after this, there was absolute silence—a thing which we usually interpret as indicating good news. After that came the news, that mother was getting worse. She had pains in the back also and was unable to rise. I was to apply for leave immediately and go there to look after mother.

I could not get leave, having exhausted it all at the time of Harry's wedding, indulging in a grand tour, comprising of Jubbulpore, Kharagpore—where I had an uncle—Calcutta, Benares, Agra and Delhi. It was at Calcutta standing on what I believe is the Prinsep Ghat, watching the arrival of the mail steamer from Singapore, that

my wild thoughts became wilder still and I resolved to go to Malaya, come what may. The majestic vessel sailed slowly up the Hooghli, making for the landing. I could clearly see the passengers in the cabins and the crowds on the deck, in all the gorgeous colours and costumes of the East, except those who were in European dress. All were feasting their eyes on the City, impatience stamped on almost every face. There was nearly as much excitement manifest among the friends and relatives of the passengers waiting on the Ghat. There were groups of spectators, too like myself, standing there to see the arrival of the boat. In particular I noticed one bearded, big burly fellow whom I took for a Sikh, behaving just like an excited child. He smiled again and again at a white lady who looked like an aged missionary, rubbing his hands in glee over and over again, and folding them to greet her with many bows in the Indian fashion, all the while uttering, "Many thanks, many thanks, very glad Mem Sahib came," a number of times as if she had obliged him much by coming back.

I saw the lowering of boats and gangways, the bustling of licensed coolies, the activities of the Excise authorities, the rush of the passengers, the greetings on the landing place, the shouts and noises. I can never forget the scene on the Hooghli that early morning, the river with its muddy tide and numerous craft, the Babus taking their morning dips with their sun worship and pooja, decorating some stones with flowers and vermilion and saffron, the array of factory

chimneys in Howrah on the opposite shore, glimpses of verdure along the river banks, and most glorious of all this large, stately and queenly vessel, which had come from my Singapore. One poor Muslim young fellow landed with nothing but a suit-case for his luggage, but even that had to be opened and searched for contrabrand goods or perhaps for fire-arms too. The Excise people carelessly pulled out the packed articles, all clothing, and finding nothing objectionable kicked them back into a heap and proceeded to examine the pockets and even the cap on the man's head, before he was allowed to depart in peace.

Yes, I had taken a long holiday only recently and was not likely to get another so soon. So I wrote to Emmie asking her to engage some one to attend on mother, and I would see to all the expenses. Doctors were in proper attendance, injections and internal medicines given, massages, fomentations and hot water bottles applied to give the patient some ease; yet mother was restless, and her nights were sleepless. The doctors advised that she should be taken to Madras for an X-ray.

Hence, I had to take leave again. Willie joined me and in time we arrived at Emmie's place, Rangamannaar, doing the last twenty-five miles or so in a bus. It was a small town, but we passed through miles and miles of green paddy fields and clumps of wood in a smiling, fertile, but hot land. I had not seen Emmie for years and began to feel a little uneasy to meet her. But I soon discovered, for all my conjectures

as to how she might look, that she was my mother's very image, as the latter was in my childhood. She had no refinement about her now, as she chose to dress like an old fashioned and orthodox Hindu woman, her skin stained with saffron, a red or black dot perpetually on her forehead, a saree without an undergarment or petticoat, even the blouse not an up-to-date one, being only a bust bodice with elbow length sleeves and a collar, the very jewels being of a coarse make. Yes, this was Emmie who had attended the Grammar School in Madras, in stylish English dress when she was a girl. When she wore her glasses, however, at the time of sewing or reading, she showed a strong resemblance to aunt Krupa, who also wore glasses and was not very much older than her niece. She was not pretending to be a Hindu, but only as a high caste convert who could not give up the old customs and prejudices. She did not mind fetching water from the well herself, with the big brass water-pot on her hip and the chembu in her hand. There was a photo in a frame, showing Emmie fetching water in this fashion with her hair all loose, looking somewhat like the daughters of Rishis one reads about, who fetched the water from the lake to the sylvan retreats of their saintly sires. As my sister was the headmistress of her school like Mary, the conductresses were practically her domestic servants and so far, my mother lacked no comforts.

It was harrowing to see mother lying helpless as an infant on her back in her bed; my mother once so active, who, in the

house where father died, used to pace up and down the small hall with quick and restless steps like a caged lioness or she-bear. Her face, too, had lost much of its contour. In my profession, one sees all sorts of ghastly sights of physical disease and pain, and one's heart is soon hardened enough to be able to endure such things without a nervous break-down. But here, though I tried to put on a pleasant face, as if mother's illness was nothing more than a temporary trouble, pain was gnawing at my heart. I saw that even in her sickness, she had not given up her favourite habit of chewing pan the whole of the livelong day; for not only were the stains conspicuous on her teeth and lips, but there stood, on the window sill touching her bed and on a level with it, a little brass jar or spittoon for spitting the saliva.

At one end of the long room was a dressing-table, with its mirror and two large life-size celluloid dolls, several shells and other pieces of ornament. Sitting in a chair, with her back to the new arrivals, was a young woman, stitching some garment on a Singer hand-machine that stood on the dressing-table. She was stooping over her work, and from what I saw of the girl she had a polished black skin and was slim without being scraggy.

Willie and I sat on mother's bed, and after our greetings and a few preliminary enquiries were exchanged, I began feeling a little uneasy to start any private topic in the presence of the stranger in the room. Both Willie and I were passive listeners most of the time, getting rather

annoyed at the young woman's rudeness for not clearing out of the room, when the children of the patient come from a long distance would like to talk many private matters with her. But what was our astonishment, when my mother addressing the girl said : " Krishna, why don't you come forward and greet your aunt and uncle ? "

" Aunt and uncle ! " we gasped and stared at the stranger. Krishna placed her work carefully on the table, rose and making a quick right about turn, gave us each a wink of her eye, and raising her hand to her brow in a sort of military salute, began a harangue : " Salaam, aunty ; salaam, most worthy uncle. "

" There, don't talk nonsense. " rebuked my mother.

The girl was dressed in a snow-white voile saree without ample folds, and wore a low necked jumper blouse of white silk with small pink square lines. Not a jewel was on her person, save a very delicate gold chain with a small cross. Her humour-flashing large and luminous eyes winking alternately at Willie and me as she stood now leaning on the dressing-table excited my curiosity as much as it mystified me as to who the person might be, so much so that I had not even noticed that I had failed to return her greetings.

" You sly puss, " remarked my mother, " is that all you have got to say to your uncle and aunt ? "

" Most respectable aunty, how do you do ? And most honourable uncle, I hope you had a pleasant

journey in the heat and dust. Weather not too bad today, is it? Now, if the two of you have a pinching in 'the tummy, let me know. Aunt, if your travel-stained skin is so fair, I should like to see how it would glow after a wash. I am not very particular about your own complexion, uncle. You are just like me, only not so fair." In fact she was blacker than her 'uncle'.

How she could utter in one breath and so rapidly, so many and such incongruous things, and to such strangers passed my comprehension, though I laughed heartily and Willie looked seriously at mother as if for enlightenment.

"You must either sit mum like a dumb creature or pour out all your eloquence at once," my mother said. "Go and get some coffee ready for them."

"Grand-ma' and aunt, threatened to take off my head, if I opened my mouth without permission to talk. I knew that if I looked at you, my tongue would go of its own accord and cost me my head. It would be so inconvenient to stitch, or to attend on patients with no head on one's shoulders you see," winking all the time mischievously at Willie and me. "So I thought it better to appear rude and not give you a reception than loose my head. Aunt and uncle (this time twitching her nose in accompaniment to her winks) if you give me leave, I shall go and see, whether my wife has got everything ready for you," and without our leave she was off in the twinkling of an eye, leaving us quite amused at her extraordinary behaviour.

"Who is she, Ma'? I asked.

Mother answered in a confidential whisper: "Emmie's daughter, but she does not know it. She is only thinking that she is an orphan niece adopted by Emmie. You just behave as if you know nothing of her birth."

"Was it Emmie whom she referred to as 'aunt'?" I asked.

"Yes, she calls Emmie, 'aunty'."

"Such a big girl, quite a young woman! I expected to see a child," I exclaimed.

"A child, after so many years have passed!" My mother tried to laugh but the pain made her moan for the effort.

"Then, who is her wife?" Willie asked.

"Oh, it is the conductress, Radha. You know that Radha was the wife of the Hindu god Krishna. Our Krishna always teases the conductress like that."

For some unaccountable reason, though so many years had passed since Emmie's fall, I persisted in picturing her child as a small girl still in frocks. So, this interesting young woman was really my niece, the coachman's daughter. Those days of nightmare rushed back to my memory with oppressive vividness—my mother's base lover's clandestine visits, our drives to the Botanical Gardens in his carriage, Emmie's lonely walks with the coachman, who had something 'important' to tell her regarding his master, the signs of motherhood detected, the rough treatment given to Emmie, the renewed outbreaks between father and mother, and aunt Krupa's coming to

the rescue of her favourite niece and playmate! Had more than two decades really passed after these mournful events? Emmie's unwanted child! with whom she would not part and preferred exile with her bastard! What a prejudice I had against this girl, in common with the rest of the family! I had often felt that we should not own this nameless girl, if anything in the world should bring us into contact with her. But here was the very individual making one and all fall in love with her, poor innocent thing, who was in no way responsible for her coming into the world. Now I understood that she was God's child. The common fallacy is that those whom we despise and scorn and hate, are scorned, despised and hated likewise in heaven. If only that merry witty girl came to know of the infamy attached to her birth, would her fun, humour and merriment continue the same? Could she endure the thought of it and live? I pitied the poor creature from the depths of my heart.

Krishna reappeared and began a harangue: "Most respected aunty and uncle, would you care to partake of some poor refreshments in our humble cottage? I say, has the old dear been a bore to you? Very talkative, grand-ma'; not a bit as good as I am. So I hope you will put up with her infirmities."

"Will you do us the honour to introduce us to your wife?" asked Willie, as we rose to follow her.

She laughed a little and then said: "Yes, certainly with pleasure. Hi, Radha, old bag, where

are you? Come out at once and pay your humble respects to my honoured aunt and uncle."

Radha came blundering along, a brown-skinned, withered old woman, with bleared eyes, high cheek bones and decaying yellow teeth that in the front were broken to the level of the gums. She was half giggling and half serious as she made her 'thothirams' to us joining her palms.

"A very handsome young lady, a wife for any man to be proud of," said Willie.

"Uncle, don't abuse hospitality by ogling my wife like that. But between ourselves, she was handsomer before she lost her walrus teeth which were so shaky that they actually swung to and fro whenever she spoke. Now, of course, she is not half so handsome. But all the same, you have no right to cast your eyes on another man's wife. I pray you with many salaams, behave yourself, or I shall be obliged to challenge you for a duel to defend her honour, kill you, and then wear mourning. Why all this trouble? So better leave off admiring my Radha."

To me, however, the uncle appeared to be admiring the niece a little too much, much more than could be natural with so short an acquaintance.

CHAPTER XLI

LAKSHMI

I was surprised in yet another way too. We all used to call our eldest sister, Emmie, but now mother was calling her Lakshmi, which of course was her other name. I soon found out the reason. Emmie had totally dropped her old identity. Moreover, with her Hinduized ways, moving, as far as they would allow her, in Hindu society, an English name would have been ridiculous. Once my sister said to me that there was a proposal for a party from Rangamannaar to visit a famous place of pilgrimage, and whether I would like to avail myself of the chance to go thither. Both she and Krishna, were in the party of excursionists. I consented. We all took the bus bound for the place and started on the long drive, Krishna enlivening us with her lively talk and vivacious spirits, and inexhaustible fund of humour and jokes, all the way. Both mother and daughter had vermilion dots on their brows, Krishna having it only for the time being, though my sister was never without it. Before we set out, Emmie had asked me to have one on my forehead likewise, since I might not have an access into the temple otherwise. I objected. To this day, I have no definite opinion regarding the propriety of a

caste mark for a Christian. It is remarkable to note that while Protestant Christians from the beginning had abhorred it as the mark of the 'beast' of the Revelation, Catholic Christians had not thought it so. In these days, when educated and refined Hindu ladies are ceasing to be particular about the dot, Protestant Christians here and there are going in for it. They declare that it is only from an æsthetic point of view that they favour it, as part of their make-up. But I have seen many such Protestant Christians including the ladies of my family, using the bottu in order to pass off for caste converts. Whether my objection was reasonable or otherwise, I answered:

"I won't have the bottu, and if they won't allow me inside, I shall wait in the bus at the gate for you."

"What nonsense, aunty," Krishna chid her mother. "So many refined and up-to-date Hindu ladies do not have the bottu at all, and nobody objects to their entering a temple. Even without a bottu, Meena aunty looks more like a Brahmin lady than you and I with all this paraphernalia. Don't bother about the dot, Meena aunty; you just come in and see those horrid looking idols which are not worth a millionth part of the trouble the priests are taking to conceal them. In one respect they do deserve being hidden away for the fright they give one. Look here, I declare, that if the priests give you any trouble, I will lose my head first before you come to any harm."

My curiosity was overcoming my scruples that it was wrong to impose on the temple authorities. "But all the same, we are cheating them, are we not? If they knew we were Christians, they would murder us; would they not?"

"But the fact remains that they will not know; not even the gods and goddesses who stare at us with wide open eyes. Either the divinities do not agree with their votaries in forbidding anybody into their presence or they are too ignorant to make any distinction between caste and non-caste people. When the deities themselves do not object, why should we care for the priests?"

Krishna's answer set my mind at questionable rest and I consented.

"One thing Meenamma," put in my sister, "just as they go round with the collection bag in our churches, in the temple also a tray is taken round for collections. In either case the money is for the poor. I hope you will not object to give charity on religious grounds?"

"Not at all," I answered wondering how long it might have been since Emmie had been in a church for worship.

Then she went on: "The other members of the party have a vow, and they might give offerings to the images. I hope you won't object to their doing it?"

"Why should I object to other people acting according to their belief? On the other hand I should be glad for an opportunity to see what they do in a temple," I answered.

"Agreed," yelled Krishna, giving one upward spring and clapping her hands in glee.

Off we went on a pleasant ride. The approach to the temple gate and even the temple enclosure, contained many stalls chiefly on the pavement but also on tables and in cabins. There was an array of carvings in wood, and clay models, of the deities for sale, as well as paintings after the old Indian school, where nothing is natural or proportionate, in picture frames of different sizes, with the figures also worked out in copper foil of all the primary colours. There were heaps and quantities of bead garlands, shell garlands, and curios of all kinds and shapes, chief among them the peculiar craft products of the place for pilgrims, visitors and tourists to carry off as mementoes. There were stalls displaying for sale things for the offerings: flowers, betel-leaf and nut, bananas and other fruit, cocoanuts, saffron powder, scarlet, vermilion and purple powder, sweets and other things meant for a votive offering.

We all left our footwear in the bus as no one should enter a temple with shod feet. Purchases for the offerings were made and we trooped into the portico and passed through two or three rooms, all filled with images covered with flowers and vermilion and saffron. Then we arrived at the inmost shrine which was quite dark but for the candles, in brass or gold candlesticks, throwing their dim light through the shadows. There, on a raised platform, covered with some costly gold and silk cloth, stood the images in

rich apparel and blazing jewellery, their faces and limbs blotched with saffron and vermilion, and the flowers that decked them scattered all over the platform. The perfume of burning camphor, and incense pervaded the air. The priests standing in the holy of holies where pilgrims could not set a foot, received the offerings, placed them before the principal deity, broke each cocoanut that was offered and returned one-half to the worshipper with ecclesiastical blessing, and distributed some of the vermilion and saffron and flowers from the deity's body. I think it was sanctified water that the chief priest offered in a silver cup served with a silver spoon to all who were present and they splashed it on their heads. The collections were given and each one at the time of leaving, made obeisance with folded hands to the principal and minor deities, some of the latter being historical persons and in their times kings of the place. When it came to this and I saw Emmie and Krishna doing likewise, I took to my heels and abruptly left the shrine, the priests in their ecclesiastical robes of a single garment—the loin cloth—and their sacred thread giving me but a casual glance. They did not even seem to notice my hesitation to sprinkle the holy water on my head, instead of which I let it slip between my fingers and run to the floor.

The images were hideous in the extreme. I wonder why our Hindu brothers do not give at least a natural human form to the representation they make of God. Again, if that were the God universal who created them and me and everybody, then why are Christians, Muslims, Untouchables

and foreigners forbidden to enter the place where everybody's God resides? And here, were we, Christians and, on that very account Untouchables, trespassing on forbidden ground and neither the priests nor the deities by any means aware of the sacrilege! I wondered how many Untouchables in this way were entering the temples hoodwinking those fanatics who were thundering against any attempt to tamper with the caste system!

We made several purchases, the Hindus of our party buying the prasadam or food that had been offered to the gods, and I selecting mementoes to give as presents to my friends. Though I was shocked at the behaviour of my two relatives for making the obeisance, when they did not worship the idols and felt no reverence for those horrid creatures, I could not pass a word of remark in front of the Hindu occupants of the bus. Nor was it with composure that I contemplated my own part in the imposture. We had a discussion after reaching home.

"Where is the harm in a little joke, aunty?" asked Krishna. "Now, if I make a pretty bow like this with folded hands to those dolls (indicating the celluloid babies on the dressing-table) is it with a belief that they represent God? It is just fun. If people are so foolish as to make foolish prohibitions, there are ways to outwit them."

I never liked arguments, not only because I was never at an advantage for words but also because if people are bent on justifying themselves

for whatever they do, what was the good of wasting eloquence on them?

At Rangamannar, there was a middle-aged Brahmin widow, who looked much more aged on account of her shaven head and widow's weeds. She was a great pal of Emmie. She was a very good natured woman, though a firm believer in the orthodox religion, and called us by names indicating relationship even if she considered taking a cup of water from our hands as destroying her caste. She showed her affection by presenting us with curries and sweets prepared for occasions, and though she would never accept anything cooked by us, did not object to take fresh fruits and vegetables. This woman was simply mad on travelling and sight-seeing although there was neither ambition nor desire to look beyond the shores of India in her dreams; for hers was the faith which looked upon every Hindu who went abroad as forfeiting all the privileges of caste and becoming a sort of Untouchable too. While we were busy arranging to take mother to Madras for the X-ray, Emmie and Krishna taking the opportunity to see Madras, this Gangamma expressed a keen desire to go with us. Brahmins can see places in India far more easily than others can do. There are Brahmins in every town and village, and whether there is remote kinship or a distant marriage connection or not even that, according to the rules of hospitality, they must entertain one of the priestly caste, especially if that individual happens to be on the way to or back

from a pilgrimage, in which case the family of the host is supposed to be partakers of the merits of the guest's pilgrimage. In all the ancient cities where Hinduism had flourished under the old rulers, there are free shelters and free supplies of meals to all the pilgrims for some days, and as such, Brahmins of the older order who do not need modern conveniences can visit several places without much anxiety regarding expenses. However it was not on a pilgrimage that Gangamma was coming with us. But still considerations of board and lodging did not worry her, since she had, I believe, a twenty-first cousin, on whose hospitality she had a claim, and also as an orthodox Brahmin widow whose hope for reunion with her husband consisted in self-denial, she could exist on the minimum possible comfort. She could eat twice a day, if convenient, if not satisfy herself with only one meal and stretch her weary frame on anybody's pial to pass a night—caste did not come in the way of selecting a place for sleeping. We had several friends in the city who all wanted to put us up. We stayed near the hospital, Gangamma going home for a meal or two or satisfying herself with the fruits that we gave her and staying away with us.

In spite of having her own opinion about the dust and heat and odours of the City, Gangamma used to gasp and strike her breast like a wondering child, at the sight of the crowds, the shops, the traffic and other strange things she saw. When we went to the People's Park the small Zoo of Madras, she passed some commonplace

remarks when the turn of the other beasts and birds and reptiles came, but as we approached the kangaroos however, she was visibly overcome with emotion at their hopping on the two hind feet instead of using all the four. She lamented the crimes of these creatures in a former birth which had visited them with insufficient forelegs in this birth. "I am sure," she remarked to us who had a tremendous task to look grave when she was groaning and beating her breast: "I am sure, these sinners were a band of highway robbers when they were humans and their special practice seems to have been to chop off the fore-arms of their victims. It is impossible to account for the tragedy of those shrunken limbs in any other way." Gangamma paused longer at this enclosure than elsewhere and breathed a pious prayer loud enough for us all to hear, that the All-Merciful God would graciously remit the sentence and withdraw the curse for the sake of a Brahmin's prayer, so that kangaroos in coming generations no longer hopped on their hind legs alone. While the rest of us were struggling to control the laughter that was bubbling up, Krishna, the incorrigible Krishna, could pretend to be overcome too in order to tease Gangamma.

"Surely, aththai (father's sister), I can tell you the kangaroo's antecedents. These fellows were the old-time Pindarees and Thugs who used to go about in gangs waylaying peaceful travellers—pilgrims to the holy city of Benares—to impress the superstitious woman all the more). They did not actually chop off their victims' arms, but since they

murdered the pilgrims with their own hands, they have received withered forelegs in this life."

Gangamma shuddered as she heard this story and exclaiming: "Hara, Hara" (oh God, oh God) turned back and addressed a kangaroo which was cropping the coarse grass near-by, all unconscious of the sympathy he and his kin had roused in the visitor's breast: "You have my pity, poor creatures, but you had no pity for harmless human beings your fellow-men, and holy pilgrims too. I hope you will perform a penance and be reborn as something better."

The murderer thus spoken to, gave a mighty leap and went and joined his fellow-criminals in a series of bounds. Krishna was about to come forward with more of her theories as to what the other animals were in a previous birth, to play on the credulity of our simple friend, when I gave her a dig and asked her to keep her precious tongue from concocting stories about the lions and tigers too. She scratched her head like a monkey, grinned like one, without laughing, though with her large bright eyes she might have been compared to a lemur, and to keep her tongue employed some other way, started eating the peanuts she was taking for the animals. How I liked that girl and wished she would resign her job in the local hospital and join the nursing staff in my hospital instead!

"Krishna, do you never laugh?" I asked her. "You say all that rubbish so seriously as if you verily believed in its truth, while we are shaking with laughter?"

"I think aunty, God made my nerves too rigid and coarse to be easily tickled. I like to laugh but can't. But would you believe, when I was a school girl, in one of the school functions, they gave me the laughing part, just because people laugh when I talk? One can talk any amount of nonsense, but how to laugh when you don't feel like laughing yourself? They would not accept my objections and so I went to it like a gramophone record, the more lustily, the more the spectators fell into hysterics. But I did not really feel amused at all. The capacity to enjoy laughter also is a gift, isn't it?"

At last the object of our visit to Madras was over. The X-ray photo revealed that the lumbar region of the spine was diseased and that the disease was spreading rapidly. It would result in spinal paralysis. A heavy weight now settled in my heart. So my mother's fate was sealed. She was to lie helpless on her back, day in day out, till death gave her release. Only Willie and I knew what was coming on. We thought we should not disclose the truth abruptly without preparing Emmie and the others for the same. Anyway, mother must be with me. I resolved to admit her in hospital and give her what personal care and attention I could, and brought her away with me.

As I looked on that helpless form, once so active and virile, the sins that had brought so much sorrow to her husband and her wrongs to her children vanished like mist from my brooding mind. Only her maternal love and care were

uppermost in my thoughts and wrung my heart. If at least she had felt the grace to think with shame and sorrow, the manner in which she had cast off her womanly modesty, and all the ways in which she had dishonoured her Heavenly Father, instead of maintaining that what she did was forced upon her, was quite justifiable or at least excusable, I might have been comforted. If she could only make her peace with her Maker, I would have rejoiced.

One other incident, when I think of Rangamannaar comes to my mind. It was there that I had just missed being brought into contact for the third time unexpectedly with Miss Parsons. Emmie had taken me to her school one day, as Mary had done at Purnamati. While there she asked me: "Do you know Mrs. Stuart, Meenamma? She comes from your parts."

I replied that I had never known anybody by that name.

"Oh, but I mean she was a Miss Parsons before. She was our S. A. I. but recently married Dr. Stuart, Civil Surgeon."

"Miss Parsons, married!" I exclaimed, as if I could have expected anything to happen but that. A woman with such a surface did not strike me as attracting any man.

"Yes, she is," my sister went on, "he is rather an elderly man with some children by his late wife. Miss Parsons is a nice person, though not pretty."

True, I thought, people may not be attracted to her at first sight, but it was not unnatural

that a personal acquaintance would subsequently lead any one to love her for the beauty of her soul. Then I asked: "Is she here now?"

"No, they have just gone for their honeymoon," said Emmie, and she and the other teachers began to describe how the friendship between Dr. Stuart and Miss Parsons had developed, and I was glad to hear it; it was a pretty story and I was happy that the dear friend need not be sad about her looks any longer.

CHAPTER XLII

I KNOW WHY

I was, as you might expect, rather nervous, lest Maria should recognise my mother and claim kinship with me, though standing on the eve of the most staggering, the final, finishing blow of all, little guessing that there was something worse than I had known all along, something which would make even Maria shrink from owning me as a relative. My pride, which had received several set-backs and reverses, by each succeeding tragedy, had nevertheless not ceased to be. It would raise its dragon-head now and then, unaccountably—to be struck down even more lower than before. However thirty-five-years of separation and the vicissitudes passed through, by each of them had changed them beyond recognition by each other. But I used to notice my mother often looking at my servant's six fingers and wonder whether they had brought back anything to her memory. Maria was such a dreadful gossip, and so fearing lest unpleasant revelations should crop up if I did not place mother on her guard, I related the servant's story to the patient one day. Thereafter, my mother would scan Maria's face, as if to find any trace of the old likeness there, but the six fingers left her

no room to doubt her identity, whereas Maria's old name was the one by which my mother had known her.

A sort of half missionary, half Bible-woman was then working at Timmarayahali in those days. No one knew whether she was a wife or a widow, her husband having abandoned her and gone to Natal, after which he was heard of no more. She who had been sore battered by some of the roughest storms of life, was a pure, chastened soul in middle age and lived a dedicated life that was of comfort and help to all to whom the world had only thorns to give. This Mrs. Samuel had taken a fancy to mother and spent some time every day conversing with her. I used to see not only a Bible, but several religious tracts and leaflets on my mother's bed. One day, mother suddenly asked me, whether I could arrange for a prayer meeting at my quarters.

My mother was suffering from pain, but though at first she groaned and complained, later on she seemed to be fighting it down with clenched teeth, and that fearful gleam in her eyes was giving place slowly to a softer, more spiritual expression. Mercifully, she was not aware that lying on her back was to be her portion for all life. One day, she told me that Sophie had appeared to her in a sort of vision, with the message that her end was not far off and that there would be rejoicing in heaven if she disburdened herself of an oppressive secret, a ghastly falsehood which her dead child besought her to confess. Confession of that would be going through hell,

but that was to be done if the soul that was about to depart would be purified of its earthly iniquities. Mother had not seen Sophie die, though the poor girl had kept calling for her in her last moments. But nothing in the world caused my mother greater distress than the mere mention of Sophie's name. The reunion with the family had given her back every one except this departed daughter, the truthful child whom she had driven to tell lies. But when I saw that my mother was peacefully preparing for the end, my own heart was at rest to that extent. If with pain and shame for her wrongs to God and man, she had obtained her Maker's forgiveness and was going into His presence cleansed of all the guilt on her soul, I would gladly let mother die, no matter what the world might mean to me without her.

Another day, she called me and said that a terrible secret was preying on her soul and she could not die, without shedding the burden while she lived. She said no more, and I was puzzled as to what that secret might be, at the same time an instinctive fear making me shrink from seeking to know it. Once or twice she opened her mouth and began a sentence which was dropped before the nature of the confession could be made out. All that she did then was to ask me to pray for courage to be vouchsafed to her to make that confession.

A third time, she began: "My child, I have wronged you more than you could ever guess. In this world, you and you alone are going to bear the worst consequences of my own sins. But God

loves you all the more for the persecution that may be your portion in this life. You see how fast the years are flying? Fortunately, life is not permanent and you get your relief one day—the day that you will be in the Father's kingdom. I have an awful secret to tell you, but these mortal eyes cannot bear to see the pain your wretched mother has inflicted on you. God has forgiven me, for He sees that the tortures and torments of an eternal hell I am going through in these last days of life for the well planned and deliberate acts of wickedness I have done, for speaking ill of others always, and for all the horrible ways in which I have spent the long years given to me, when I could have done what was in my power, to make the home a peaceful and godly one, and could have shown mercy to others. My physical pain is nothing before the anguish of my soul. Why did I not think of the price that I would have to pay at the end for a wanton and unprofitable life? Why did I not think that I, too, would have to die some day and face Him who made me for His glory and to help others to come to Him? But His long suffering patience has not cut me off without a chance for remorse and repentance. He has given me time to reflect slowly, leisurely, on what I have made of my own life. I did not understand before, that not so much for His own profit as for our own peace of mind, that He has asked us to feel for others as we feel for our own selves. Our hard-heartedness does not hurt others so cruelly as it does ourselves in the end. It is not God who punishes; not at all. But

it is the very reaction of our doings that makes us taste the pain we would inflict on others. If I had died in those days of sin and deception and rebellion, what would have become of my soul? He has given me enforced idleness, I am sure, only to take stock of all my past and He has given me a friend to tell me all about Him and to pray for me. I know the extent of my wrong-doing now. Sophie comes in my dreams and makes me think of what I had been, the poor child, whom I made to suffer so much and deserted in her last days."

My mother was tired, she gasped and panted, and every now and then a deep sigh escaped her. I did not understand her mysterious words, and yet dreaded the revelation. She was rapidly sinking. I took her to the rooms which Mrs. Jeremiah on account of my urgent need had placed at my disposal in her house. I sent messages to all my brothers and sisters and they came, except Harry who was in Burmah. Maria left me to work for my people and only brought my meals to the hospital whenever I was unable to go home and eat.

One evening, after waiting on my mother for a long time, I retired into one of the rooms and threw myself on a bed weary with watching and sorrow. Mrs. Samuel came looking for me and placed in my hand a letter superscribed in Tamil and written in a rambling scrawl. It was my mother's hand. My heart heavy with grief at my mother's imminent call from earth, beat like loud sounding drums and

the letter slipped from my quivering fingers before I could open it. Sarah, Maria's little girl had appeared in the meantime with my dinner. She was to wait on me and clear away the things after I had finished my meal. At first I was almost unconscious of her presence. Then with a significant nod I indicated that she should set the food down somewhere and clear out. The girl placed my food on the table but in direct disobedience to my wish persisted in standing there in spite of my repeated nods and waving of the hand, and when under deep provocation I glared at her and demanded what was the matter, she made a deep salaam and took to her heels. So for the sake of this salaam, the wretch would take no notice of my orders nor my desire not to be disturbed. To her, the courtesy was part of her duty, and she was bent on omitting no part of it, fearing that I would be otherwise displeased with her, unconscious of the ocean that was closing over me. I bolted the door inside to prevent any more intrusions of this kind and then opened and read the letter as follows:

“My child,

“I who am about to face the dread Creator in a few days, perhaps, a few hours, with the peace that comes to the ransomed who are washed by the blood of Jesus, am yet unable to meet your look after you have known what it is that I have been wanting to say, all these days. You will be mad Meenamma; the light will go out of your life. But do not kill yourself.

If you knew that I am undergoing at this minute all the concentrated pain of years of your own suffering, you will forgive, as God has forgiven me. After you read this, if you can come and tell me, 'mother I forgive you', then I shall pass away in peace. If not, God the merciful help me. Meena, darling, you are not my husband's child. You are the daughter of the man whom I allowed to destroy my home. God help you and me."

When I came to myself, I wondered why I was lying on the ground and what that piece of paper was that I felt in my hand. Then the ocean rushed into my memory and I knew what it was that had knocked me down out of my senses. "Oh woman, what in all this sin-sick world can beat a crime and treachery like this?" I shrieked. "Why did you bring me forth? Are you my mother? What right had I to be in this world? Is it for this you want my forgiveness?"

Can words spoken or written describe my madness, the reeling of my senses, the utter loss of knowing what to do, where to go, to whom to look for one word of peace? For anybody there would be a friend in the world, but no friend, no relative for me. I was not a natural thing. I was an abortion. Was this a thing which I could share with another human being, for the balm of sympathy? Now I knew the meaning of everything: why I was so unlike everybody in the family, why that vile,—oh God for utterance what to call that man, who was my natural father—why that vile wretch was so

fond of me; why mother wanted to go away with me to him; why she told aunt Kezia that none of her people had any claim over me? I recollected that my maddened raving might attract attention. I got up feeling that I was living and moving in a region which was no longer the world that I had known. Feelings were dead and the mind had suddenly lost its weight. I could have laughed and danced at the moment. I had to strike many matches before my unsteady fingers could allow a flame last long enough to catch the letter and burn it to ashes. I withdrew the bolts, threw myself on the bed again and reflected. What was going to become of me? Darkness again. I was groaning. "What is the matter, Meena?" Davy's voice startled me. "You must be very tired. Mother is sinking and calling for you. Come, quickly."

I rose and tried to stand, but was going to collapse again, when Davy caught me, and said in a tone of reproach: "You are an educated girl, Meena, and must not take it to heart so much. It is hard to lose our mother no doubt, but we are getting middle-aged ourselves and she is old. It is her time, and you have sisters and brothers who love you."

"Sisters and brothers indeed! Was I their father's daughter? If they only knew that?" So I reflected, but said nothing. The poor man's brotherly affection was hard to bear. I tried to disengage myself but found myself too weak to do so. We reached mother's bed-side. The courage of despair, the courage of DESPAIR mind you,

gave a strength that I could not understand. They were all weeping silently. Mother opened her eyes and cast a feeble glance at me. Her lips moved but they were powerless to utter a word. I sat on her bed and said: "Mother, it is all right, don't worry. You are glad to go to God's kingdom where there is no sickness, no pain, no sorrow. This life is not going to last for ever and we are all going to the same place and join those already there."

She could not speak, but tears rolled down from her eyes. Emmie, herself crying, wiped them off with the fringe of her sarce. After that my mother's face lit up with a strange radiance that was good to see. We all watched her as she fixed her eyes on the electric bulb hanging from the roof and about midnight she passed away. I did not shed a single tear. I simply sank to the floor and sat with my face buried in my mother's bed-clothes, as Mary and Emmie sobbed aloud. Mrs. Jeremiah, sympathetic and kind all along, raised me and took me back into my room asking me to rest. How could she or anybody else know, that rest in the world was for other's not for me? That the poignancy of grief would wear out in time for others, but not for me? Even in the midst of troubles and turmoils, rest and peace could come to them: how for me? I could not spend much time out of sight of that form which was my mother's, the only thing that till its burial would be a tie to bind me to the earth, and so I went to the death-chamber again. As I did not weep, I was permitted to stay on there.

People began to arrive, flowers and wreaths came. The Jeremiahs insisted on our having some refreshments on the morrow morning, which we were in no mood to take. Doctor came and placed a wreath on the lid of the coffin after the body was placed in it. She permitted all the hospital people who had attended on mother or known her, to file past the coffin. We took our last look of the face and the lid was nailed down. The funeral service over, the coffin left the house in a procession. The church-yard was reached, the burial service performed, the coffin was lowered into the grave, and we cast our handfuls of earth and stood by till the pit was filled. Then we returned home leaving mother to rest there till the day of resurrection.

I went back to the house, but could not eat or drink or do any sensible thing. I was simply stunned and dazed. What did they know, who tried to comfort me?

"Dr. Prakasarao must take long rest and stay with one of you. She must have a change of place. She is taking it too much to heart," Mrs. Jeremia remarked.

I groaned. What right had I to the name? "Will you please leave me alone, only for tonight and make your suggestions tomorrow?" I pleaded.

"But Meena, you must make up your mind to come with me," said Emmie.

"Or with me," put in Mary.

"The best thing for her is to have a little tour; not the same place always," suggested Davy.

"But aunt Kezia wants her. Meenacca (elder sister) is her adopted child, and so Sunderkote would be the best place for her." This was Willie's counsel.

Aunt Kezia! My foster-mother? If she knew who I was! I groaned and begged them all to leave me.

Despair sometimes gives extraordinary strength. After they had left me, I abandoned myself to the consideration of that wild scheme, I once had entertained. Go to Malaya. If I continued weak and inconsolable, they would force me to go with one of them. Was I to deceive them with the full possession of knowledge? No; not for the worlds. They were blessed people; I was the basest of mankind. The love of all the years from my birth would tear my heart from me to part with them for ever. but that was about the best restitution I could make for the long though unconscious deception. If ever there could be solace, this would be the only one. They must not see me again. So I must gather all my powers to make one mighty effort to live and move like happier people. I wanted to go back to my work, brain on fire, heart blistered. I must wait for an opportunity, resign my post here and say good-bye to India, for ever and ever.

The next day I rose, pale and weak, but fiercely determined to look quite myself, in order to decline all invitations with a show of perfect self-control. The brothers and Mary left and only Emmie stayed on till the next day. That day, I attended hospital. Doctor kindly promised

to make some arrangement and asked me to go out at least for a fortnight's change. I assured her that I would try my best to get over the shock, and that work was the best antidote for it providing the utmost distraction. But what heart-ache, what sense of humiliation and desolation, what mental agony were my constant companions day and night ! None ever knew it. Why should they ? Of what consequence was I to anybody, in all this wide, wide world ? Doctor now and then invited me to tea, or took me to the pictures or excursions, during one of the last mentioned of which, we visited a famous power-house, where the temptation to put an end to all my misery was almost irresistible. Though it was anything but possible to look happy or to smile, I was acting a part and had to do it well. I managed to go through my duties, gazing on the cupboards packed with phials containing liquids and powders that could give a swift release.

The pride and show-piece of the family and the pet of that poor deluded man, the cuckold, who had lavished all his affection on his wife's bastard ! Ever so many trivial circumstances which used to puzzle me in my childhood and adolescence, assume their true significance now and fall into their proper places. Most remarkable of all was the occasion when he was spending a vacation at Sunderkote. He loved lonely walks but chose me as usual for his sole company. I was just below my teens. The poor man walked ahead, with bent head and slightly stooping shoulders.

I walked behind, looking at everybody and everything on the way. It was usual for people to stare at me anywhere, but I remember one particular group of women, standing at one of the doors giggling and talking indirectly, when one of them said loud enough for me to hear: "So proud of her. Thinks he himself has begotten a beauty like that." I heard the words but could not understand whom or what they meant.

Now, all these days I was busy discussing confidential matters with Mrs. Jeremiah. One of her sons-in-law was a surgeon with a large practice and would be grateful to have a lady collaborator to deal with his female clients. Mrs. Jeremiah, introducing me in a letter to him, placed him in direct communication with me. All transactions were highly confidential. I took a solemn promise from Mrs. Jeremiah and her daughter Mrs. Leonard that they would honour my secret. After I had settled the matter with Mr. Philips, I gave a month's notice to doctor. She was very sorry for me and even Mrs. Savarian, who had condescended to visit my mother both during her life and her body after death. She seemed to be growing sympathetic and expressed her profound regret. They believed that I was going to my own people, to get a job nearer to them, but I declined to discuss my plans.

According to their original arrangement, the Jeremiahs were to sail by an earlier boat, but they put off their departure for my sake. I was wishing, I had not destroyed my mother's last

letter, so that I might have sent the same for the enlightenment of her children, who could understand why I was leaving them, but on deeper reflection concluded that I had done the best thing, for in the madness of my agony, if I had only let it drop into their hands, earlier than the time came for it, I dread even to imagine what might have been the result. So, after I reached Calcutta, in a few brief sentences, I explained it all, bade farewell to them. I gave no clue, no address whereby they could know my whereabouts, and begged them that if the affection that they once had for me should ever happen to conquer their repugnance, not to desire to see me or to search for me. With the posting of this letter to Emmie, I had done my last duty to those whom I loved, and snapped the chain that had hitherto bound me to them. What was life to me? What was the world to me? A nameless, kinless, homeless wanderer, the whole world was a place of exile for me. And I had pitied Krishna!

CHAPTER XLIII

MALAYA AT LAST

I am here. Everybody is new and everything is new. The sky, like my mind, is generally overcast, the seas are purple, the forests glorious. Everywhere Chinese. It might have been a land of dreams for a short holiday with a home across the Bay of Bengal. What surroundings, what charms could comfort me now? Those days when I could still hope were gone. Do you know what it is to live without hope? Often despair had drowned me. It was impossible to try to bear the unbearable. I behaved like one in violent fits and raved and said :

"I am like the raging, foaming, lunatic whom Christ found at the foot of the Mount of transfiguration.* Something, some force of terror, before which he was like a reed shaken by the wind, or a wisp of straw on a rushing stream, threw him down and tore him to pieces. I am prostrate and my soul is racked with pitiless torture. I cannot bear this. Is it for a day, a year, or even a few years? Then that would be hope. But for me there was no such hope. Oh God, if it is true that Thou art good, pity me; if it is true that Thine is the power, then stretch out Thy hand and deliver me."

My work furnished distraction for as long as I was actually doing something, but it gave me no satisfaction or permanent relief. There was no spot on earth, which 'had peace in store for my mind. I thought of Greenland, of Sahara, of every land under the sun. Where could the heart's emptiness be filled, and where the mind's exile feel at home? I had no motive to live. Then what was the meaning that I continued to live?

Once I went to Singapore. Some preachers from India, my country, and Ceylon were at that time holding their meetings there. They said things which I had not heard, or perhaps not cared to hear, before, when the world was still something for me. They interpreted the Gospels in a manner which almost took my breath away? And yet I had read those very things, heard those very texts preached and had missed the supreme truth of it all on account of its very simplicity. For what could be stranger for unthinking Christians than to become aware that God as revealed to them in their sacred book was not the distant inaccessible symbol we had rendered Him, but nearer to us than ourselves, if we like to have His presence, and more real than our own limbs. God had not been real to me before nor to them among whom I was born and brought up. We did not know what a close and valuable acquaintance He could be, and if we had known probably would have none of such close intimacy. The distant and impersonal Being whom it was our duty to please or flatter with lip service was truly all my idea of God before. Who cares

whether we go to heaven or hell in after life, when this life is the daily struggle for us? I did not have a ghost of a notion that God is first and foremost interested in this life of ours and that it was here we could count on His sympathy and help and everything. I am sure many, many, many, church-goers, Bible-readers, and automatic prayer-repeaters miss this point which I had missed that God, indeed, co-operates with us in everything that we do, and indicates to us the lines we should take, if our plans and schemes are in perfect agreement with 'Love your neighbour as yourself', and if we allow Him to lead us on. So near, so real! To realize that Christ, to every one who wants Him, is just the same friend that He was to Mary and Martha and Lazarus, just the same in every respect to us as to those among whom He lived and moved two thousand years ago! If He had been in flesh and blood, He would have been available to only a few. Because He died and lives in spirit. He is available to all, from end to end of the earth. Why did I not understand it before? I was not such a miserable, such a hopeless wretch before. Yes, I can understand why it is that the unfortunates of the world sought Him out by their thousands on the lake-side or followed Him into the desert, forgetting even to provide themselves with refreshments, hanging eagerly on every word that came forth from His gracious lips, while the rich, the clever and the fortunate hung Him on a cross and drove nails into His

hands and feet to make Him die a lingering tormenting death. I heard the preachers tell that there is no burden that we cannot bear with Him to share it, no wound so cruel that He could not heal, no life so weary that cannot be lived in Him. They spoke of our duty to humanity. What are personal wrongs, grievances, or afflictions, when there is work to do to make the world a happier holier place? Where everybody doing God's will cannot wrong or deceive or oppress others, but lend a hand to raise the unfortunates and heal those who need healing for their several afflictions?

This wonderful news about fellowship, this message which showed that by a temporary break in our thought current any time of the night or day with the world; and establishing a circuit with heaven, we are availing ourselves of God's actual presence, was as new to me as it was at least two thousand years old. Could Christ heal wounds like mine? There are afflictions which even God cannot heal. But He can help us from feeling them as afflictions and making ourselves miserable. Perhaps, if I had been less sensitive, I would not have suffered my peculiar irremediable malady so much. Not caring whether I had a value in the eyes of the world, I might have lived an easy, care-free life enjoying the good things that came my way, without brooding over things that could not be helped.

For such a sensitive heart as mine, this message held out a hope—not a hope that what had happened could be undone—no, never: not

that anything could mitigate the poignancy of the situation—but to have a different outlook on life. to have different values for the things I had prized before. Of course none but the hopeless, the utterly perishing in despair, could find any comfort in the idea of abandoning the values, the desires, the aspirations, the hopes of a lifetime, and to change their every attitude and outlook, but I tell you for those who have no motive to live as I was, this overhauling of old values is the only thing that saves them from self-murder or the mad-house, and in the end proves to be the only thing that can give true peace of mind to anybody, fortunate or unfortunate, according to the world's standards. As I could not bear my racking pain day in day out I told you hesitatingly, Miss Bedford, that I was a creature in distress and whether Christ could help me. You encouraged me to take you into confidence, so that although at first I was reluctant and would do anything but tell the nature of my pain, I was led on step by step, for the very easing of my heart, to show you the festering wounds of my heart. You gave me much of your busy time, to be alone with me, to pray with me and for me and you asked me to pray too. It was a new kind of prayer that I learnt, as if I were talking with the kindest, closest, never betraying friend whom I had known all my life. I really felt like a child pouring out its little heart to its mother. No wonder, Christ asked us all to be like little children, simple and believing in their dealings with the Father.

I had only told you that I had an unbearable burden. No amount of prayer could relieve me of it, and at first I felt that there was no use breaking one's heart praying and hoping, to move God. I thought, I could as well supplicate to the empty air, address the solid wall before me, for all the good that I might get. I felt sick of the whole thing and raved against God and swore at Him. I was convinced that if God was really concerned with our life on this earth, then He was available only to a select few and not to all who needed healing of afflictions, body, mind and soul. I grew impatient even with you for preaching impossible things and asked you unreasonable questions.

You remember the occasion when you said: "Miss Meena (I had dropped the old name of Prakasarao, by which I was known when I stepped out of my country), suppose you take me into the fullest confidence and tell me the exact nature of your trouble? That would help me to concentrate on that particular aspect, and intercede with the Father."

"Anything but that," I said to myself and only gave you a forced smile for my answer. You looked sad and said: "Sharing means half the trouble gone, borne by another. Anyway, I won't force you. Nothing good is ever done by force. You think it over and pray for guidance."

"But how do we recognise, guidance, Miss Bedford?" I asked. You said: "What made you come to me with your trouble? You must

have prayed and we came into contact with you in our preaching. You felt that you must seek my prayer. It is a still small voice, shall we say? Something that when you take your burden to God indicates to you definitely what you must do. It may be, a Scripture text flashes into your mind which is the answer or guidance given to you. Different people feel it in different ways and at different times."

You were leaving Singapore on your tour, but were so kind as to give me some literature on fellowship and personal contact with God, and also promised to answer my letters. I felt just a little bit lighter at heart, but the longer I fought maintaining that God really ought not to compel me to reveal my ugly sore as a condition for obtaining the peace that passeth understanding. I simply struggled with God and said: "Why are you so hard upon me? Am I responsible for that which has embittered all life for me? Can't you remove the gnawing pain without another human being coming to know of it?" I had no answer. If I felt anything at all, it was that I should let you see the inside of my heart. So what I could not dare to say looking at your face, I managed to let you know in writing. To that extent your leaving me was a blessing. Your answer was extremely refreshing.

Then slowly, painfully, in the throes of unutterable agony tearing the strings of my heart I saw the desire for worldly respect, status and all the other things, the desire for

which was woven in the very substance of my being began to depart, tore itself away leaving a wound everywhere for the time. I began to cease to care for all the things which once were bound up with life and looked as if life itself were being wrung out with every effort, but slowly through much travail I made the grand discovery, that you miss a thing only if you attach some measure of value to it, not otherwise. But wisdom comes only in the inquisition chamber of our own souls. Then we ask ourselves, what can the calumny or the persecution of the world do to us when we have the Friend of friends on our side. If He is for us who can be against us?"

At the time of writing these memoirs though much peace has come into my soul, I am still far from being out of the reach of the toils of despair. What can I do with my thoughts, the surging, overwhelming ocean of thoughts? The events, or rather the gods of a lifetime were but too recently renounced to have left their old haunts for ever. The nightmare of madness steals upon me unawares, like an octopus reaching out its tentacles and seizing me in its deadly grip and not till my life-blood has been drawn from me does it let go its hold. Even heaven seems to withdraw its light from me and allow me to lose myself in darkness and madness. I am a demented creature. I dread the coming of despair, as only those can know who have been in despair—despair that does not end. Despair has been my companion, nay

part of my very substance all these months. How can I escape from its relentless pursuit, and whither can I go? I accuse God for the world's using me ill, forgetting that the world is His enemy's dominion and that those who are on His side will have ultimate triumph. I can't say, when and in what manner, the terrors leave, perhaps a flood of tears, a heart-breaking sob that shakes my being to its very foundations leaves me calm by its own reaction. I cannot say that this is peace so much as temporary resignation, but I can say that its direction is towards peace, considering the slightly enlarging intervals between these mental attacks and the gradual weakening of its intensity, a mitigation which is still a terror and far from being bearable. Nevertheless, if other songs have long ago died in my heart and on my lips, there is one I am able to sing now, whenever a tidal wave of anguish has swept over me and given me a respite. It is the last verse of a hymn which from beginning to end seems to be a faithful record of what I have gone through, so that each and every word rises from the depths of my feelings when I sing, not of course jubilantly like him who wrote it, but sorrowfully and softly—

Master, the terror is over,
The elements sweetly rest ;
Earth's sun in the calm lake is mirrored,
And heaven's within my breast ;
Linger, oh blessed Redeemer,
And leave me alone no more,
And with joy I shall make the blest harbour
And rest on the blissful shore.

Sadly, because I have no strength even to sing in glee. But it comforts me and shows me that the end of the waves of despair is near. Jesus is saying: "The winds and the waves shall obey my will," and it must be so. But Miss Bedford, your prayers for my affliction should not slacken so soon. You asked for a leaflet, but I am driven by forces beyond my control to write at their dictation a volume. Good-bye, but remember me, whenever you think of the world's afflicted in body, mind and soul.

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